THE PSYCHOLOGICAL BASIS OF HAZLITT'S CRITICISM

by

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Walter Jackson Bate has pointed out that "because of his comparative diffuseness, Hazlitt's virtues as a critic are not quickly grasped from reading a few essays."¹ Indeed, one is likely to have an impression of compositions loosely composed, of ideas left undeveloped, of judgments haphazardly made. But Mr. Bate goes on to say that a closer reading of Hazlitt's work reveals one point of view "which permeates and colors many of his other principles and gives a certain unity to his criticism."² This unifying point of view is Hazlitt's conception of "the sympathetic character of the imagination, and his belief in the absolute dependence of great art upon it."³ The conception "interweaves with his other critical principles at almost every point." It underlies, for example, Hazlitt's preference for drama, and especially for tragedy, as "the most objective, and therefore the highest form of poetry." It underlies Hazlitt's preference for English poetry as opposed to French, and his preference for Elizabethan poetry, particularly as contrasted with modern.⁴

My thesis advisor, Professor William P. Albrecht,

²Ibid., p. 126. ³Ibid. ⁴Ibid., p. 128.
suggested to me in conference that Hazlitt's criticism is based, not only on his concept of the "sympathetic imagination," but on a broader and more comprehensive psychological theory which is related to the basic concept of the "imagination." By taking into account a broader conception, it should become possible to give a more precise account of Hazlitt's criticism of the works which Hazlitt obviously considers to be less essentially imaginative--the lyric verse, the literature of (or inspired by) the French, the witty and satirical poetry, the contemporary poetry inspired by self-centered, private emotion. Professor Albrecht also pointed out a passage in Hazlitt's essay "On Dryden and Pope" which suggests a summary of the larger scheme.

It should appear, in tracing the history of our literature, that poetry had, at the period of which we are speaking, in general declined, by successive gradations, from the poetry of imagination, in the time of Elizabeth, to the poetry of fancy (to adopt a modern distinction) in the time of Charles I.; and again from the poetry of fancy to that of wit, as in the reign of Charles II. and Queen Anne. It degenerated into the poetry of mere commonplaces, both in style and thought, in succeeding reigns: as in the latter part of the last century, it was transformed by means of the French Revolution, into the poetry of paradox.¹ (Italics mine.)

Taking the above quotation as a point of departure, I will first investigate the meanings and values Hazlitt attaches to the psychological faculties mentioned therein. Central to the discussion of each faculty will be a consideration of its value relative to the others in relating the

individual human being to nature and to man. According to Hazlitt, a faculty may relate an individual to nature in the degree to which it offers a perception of truth and in the way it shapes his response to the purely aesthetic values in the external world—to what Hazlitt calls the "beauty," "passion," and "power" in the universe.¹ In addition, the exercise of each faculty has a distinguishable moral effect, differing from the others in degree of value, as it relates men to one another either through sympathy, disdain, indifference, or reasoned calculation. My introductory chapter will contain definitions of "imagination," "fancy," "wit," and "reason," respectively. (Although Hazlitt does not include "reason" in the quotation above, he frequently refers to it as part of the creative element in the "poetry of commonplaces" and the "poetry of paradox." "Reason" is also important in Hazlitt's thought as the properly "scientific" faculty as opposed to the properly moral and poetical "wit," "fancy," and "imagination.")

These definitions are a necessary prologue to the main body of this dissertation, which will attempt to relate Hazlitt's theory of the functions and the corresponding values of the various faculties to his critical theory and practice. The quotation given above suggested an organizational scheme of five chapters, to follow the introductory definitions already mentioned: The Poetry of Imagination, The Poetry of Fancy, The Poetry of Wit, The Poetry of ¹Works, V, l.
Commonplaces, and The Poetry of Paradox. Each chapter should extend, or at least reinforce, the definition of a given faculty by the evidence it affords of the faculty's role in the creative process; and therefore of its importance for defining a poetic type such as the "poetry of fancy" or the "poetry of wit." There will also be an attempt to determine whether or not Hazlitt transfers his evaluation of a particular faculty to the type of literature it inspires, in order to establish the extent to which his "faculty psychology" affords a foundation for critical judgment. Related questions concern the manner in which Hazlitt's psychological theory operates in his judgments of individual poets and their works; and how Hazlitt makes use of his theory in his analysis and criticism of a work's component parts.

Since Hazlitt's literary criticism is contained only in the loosely composed essays referred to before, in which an idea is stated but sometimes left undeveloped, whatever unity and system that Hazlitt possesses must be inferred from the body of Hazlitt's critical writing rather than from any single central work. For one thing, different parts of the system appear isolated from one another in different essays. While one essay contains an extended discussion of the historical forces at work in a particular period, another contains the general characterization of the poetry of the period, while still others contain the criticism of the individual poets and their works. There are even isolated remarks relevant to the criticism in essays on ostensibly
unrelated topics. Since Hazlitt does not develop ideas in closely reasoned arguments, as a rule, but only states them, it is relatively easy to extract statements from context without distorting their meaning. Frequently, important ideas appear in relief against a background of more trivial statements. The importance of these ideas to Hazlitt can usually be confirmed by the frequency with which he repeats some of them from essay to essay. Sometimes he will rephrase a favorite idea so that its meaning becomes clearer; at other times, he simply borrows from himself, and repeats an idea verbatim. The core of Hazlitt's critical thought can be found in *The Characters of Shakespeare's Plays, The English Poets, The English Comic Writers, The Dramatic Literature of the Age of Elizabeth*, and *The Spirit of the Age*. However, the content of these works will be supplemented by relevant material from Hazlitt's miscellaneous literary criticism, from his familiar essays, and from his formal philosophy.

I find the hypothesis that Hazlitt's criticism is unified by his conception of "fancy," "wit," and "reason," as well as by his conception of the "sympathetic imagination" to be verified by this study. Also, in the light of the whole psychology, Hazlitt's critical statements can be interpreted more precisely and more fairly. For example, Rene Wellek, describing Hazlitt's criticism as a process of "translating a work of art into a completely different set of metaphors," finds Hazlitt "in constant danger of loss of
contact with the object "literary work."\(^1\) He cites the following as a misleading description of Pope's poetry:

Hazlitt says that Pope could describe the faultless whole-length mirror that reflected his own person better than the smooth surface of the lake that reflects the face of heaven—a piece of cut glass or pair of paste buckles with more brilliance and effect than a thousand dew-drops glittering in the sun.\(^2\)

This statement is not an attempt to evoke the quality of Pope's poetry, but, instead, an attempt to evoke the quality of the poet's mind in metaphorical terms—and according to Hazlitt, Pope's mind is not predominantly imaginative, but witty. The metaphor of the whole-length mirror derives from Hazlitt's conception of "wit" as a faculty typically non-sympathetic and necessarily self-involved. The contrast of the paste buckles with the glittering dew-drops reflects Hazlitt's conception of one characteristic capacity of "wit"—the representation of objects from without, cut off from their natural beauty: The "witty" poet can best describe static, artificial objects whose full representation does not require the sympathetic projection of the "imagination."

Mr. Wellek also finds Hazlitt's praise of the subjective poetry of his own time to contradict the premise of objectivity which derives from the conception of the "sympathetic imagination."\(^3\) A knowledge of the psychological foundation of the "poetry of paradox" would illuminate Hazlitt's apparent

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\(^2\)Wellek, II, 198.  

\(^3\)Ibid., p. 202.
inconsistency (cited by Wellek) in judging the poetry of Byron superior to the poetry of Scott.¹

Finally, it is unfortunate that any single essay of Hazlitt's must leave the impression of a critic indifferent to system and theory. For Hazlitt's psychology (which is almost a philosophy) is the foundation of a systematic, although highly flexible, critical theory providing both tools for analysis and means for making sound and valuable judgments.

I would like to express my appreciation to Professor A. J. Burzle, who always encouraged me to pursue my interest in literary criticism; and to Professor W. D. Paden, who introduced me to Hazlitt's theory of the "sympathetic imagination." I would especially like to thank my advisor, Professor William P. Albrecht, who not only suggested the present topic, but who consistently gave me his expert criticism, and who frequently encouraged me by his generous words.

¹Ibid.
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In relating Hazlitt's psychological theory to his critical theory and practice, it is both convenient and necessary to begin by analyzing Hazlitt's conception of those faculties which he identified as sources of literary invention. Hazlitt's conception of a faculty involves a theory of the manner in which it operates and of the ends which this operation achieves. Therefore, his concept of a given faculty includes his judgment of its value and his reasons for this judgment. The question of Hazlitt's evaluation of "reason," "wit," "fancy," and "imagination" forms the focal point of the following discussions.

**Hazlitt's Conception of the Imagination**

Hazlitt valued the "imagination" above "wit," "fancy," and "reason" in the first place because the "imagination" provided him his most important weapon with which to combat the materialists' theory of the mind. According to Hazlitt's conception of it, the "imagination" corrects a false and
inadequate psychology by giving man both a principle of disinterested moral action and an approach to truth which bestows validity upon his natural intuitive perceptions. Hazlitt began his battle against materialist philosophy in his first published essay, *The Principles of Human Action*. Basing his argument on his conception of the role that "imagination" takes in all voluntary action, Hazlitt here rejects the Hobbesian doctrine of the natural selfishness of the human mind. Because of the importance of this argument to Hazlitt's thought as a whole, I shall repeat it here.

Central to Hazlitt's argument in *The Principles* is a demonstration that the mind is only partly material, and therefore only partly dominated by material causes. Sensation alone is completely dependent upon material cause, memory partly, the "imagination" not at all. Only sensation and memory force man to be consumed with self-interest: "The operation of both these faculties is of a perfectly exclusive and individual nature; and so far as their operation extends (but no farther) is man a personal, or if you will, a selfish being."1 Memory is derivative from sense impression—through it the self extends into the past. Since there is no faculty "on which the events of the future can be impressed beforehand," the "imagination," whose province is the future rather than the present or the past, must deal with the unreal, the incorporeal; the visionary, the undefined.2 Having posited

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1Works, I, 38.  
2Ibid., p. 8.
the capacity of the "imagination" for dealing with the future and the unreal, Hazlitt has laid an important foundation stone in his proof of the existence of a principle of disinterested moral action.

First Hazlitt shows that self-interest itself would be an impossibility without the activity of the "imagination." If a child has been burned, he cannot dread the fire without the help of his "imagination."

But for this faculty of ... extending ... his original passive impressions, he must be utterly blind to the future and indifferent to it, ... unable to avoid or remove the most painful impressions ... Without this faculty ... he must remain ... the passive instrument of undreaded pain and unsought-for pleasure. ... In fact he imagines his continued approach to the fire until he falls into it; by his imagination he attributes to the fire a power to burn, he conceives of an ideal self endued with a power to feel, and by the force of the imagination solely anticipates a repetition of the same sense of pain which he before felt.¹

By an easy transition, the faculty which makes self interest and self love possible becomes the foundation of sympathy with others. Just as fear arises from a projection of the self into the future--an unreal and imaginatively conceived future, imaginative sympathy springs from a projection of the self into the interests of others, which are also in a sense unreal to an observer, and must therefore be imaginatively conceived.

In regard to both the passions of sympathy and of fear, the extent of the knowledge determines the extent of the passion. Once a child has experienced the pain of fire, the

¹Works, I, 20-21.
extent to which he is acquainted with this evil determines the intensity of his fear, not only for himself, but, by an intuitive association of ideas, for any other human being whom he sees in a similar danger.\textsuperscript{1} Thus, Hazlitt also says of the passion of sympathy: "Our sympathy is always directly excited in proportion to our knowledge of the pain, and of the disposition and feelings of the sufferer."\textsuperscript{2} Hazlitt feels that although self interest exists, an extreme and exclusive self interest is an unnatural corruption of human nature which could arise only from habitual cultivation of selfish interests. But, on the other hand, "a sentiment of general benevolence can only arise from an habitual cultivation of the natural disposition of the mind to sympathise with the feelings of others by constantly taking an interest in those which we know, and imagining others that we do not know."\textsuperscript{3}

Thus, the "imagination" deals with the non-material world, has the power of extending and recombining passive impressions, and makes possible an intuitive sympathy with the world of sentient beings outside the self. This intuitive sympathy, properly cultivated, provides a natural principle of benevolent human behavior or moral action. All these attributes of the "imagination" become relevant in some way in Hazlitt's later critical writing, although the most important of them is perhaps the last: the greatest artist consistently cultivates his "natural benevolence" by his efforts to

comprehend the feelings of others in order to depict them; the most sensitive reader or critic, in responding to great art, must necessarily be extending his own imaginative sympathy. The greatest work of art elicits the strongest feelings of sympathy from both writer and reader, doing most to cultivate sentiments of general benevolence.

The second important role of the "imagination" in Hazlitt's battle against materialist and mechanist philosophy and psychology is its function in the perception and interpretation of the world of experience. Hazlitt discusses this aspect of the "imagination" in one of his most significant essays on literary theory, "On Poetry in General." My analysis is based primarily on this essay, although I have used illustrative material from several other sources.

It should perhaps be pointed out that in discussing the nature of the "imagination" Hazlitt does not separate the strictly poetic functions of the faculty from either its moral or its intuitive ones. Poetry, conceived either as a mental activity or as a product of the "imagination," is, to be sure, distinguished from science, but not always from ethics and philosophy. The entire discussion indicates, I think, that Hazlitt is quite capable of defining poetry in terms of morals or knowledge and, in turn, of defining ethical and epistemological concepts in terms of poetry.

In his analysis of the "Romantic reaction" in *Science and the Modern World*, Alfred North Whitehead says that "the literature of the nineteenth century . . . is a witness to
the discord between the aesthetic intuitions of mankind and the mechanism of science."¹ The poetry of the period "bears witness that nature cannot be divorced from its aesthetic values."² Hazlitt seems to be aware of this discord, for it is one of the most important functions of the "imagination," as he conceives it, to perceive and respond to the aesthetic values in nature. "The poetical impression of any object is that uneasy, exquisite sense of beauty or power . . . that strives to link itself to some other image of kindred beauty or grandeur; to enshrine itself . . . in the highest forms of imagination."³ Therefore, the poet need not strip nature of "the colours and shapes" lent it by the "imagination" although the scientist may do so. Hazlitt uses two opposing views of a glow-worm to differentiate the aesthetic from the mechanistic interpretation of nature.

Let the naturalist . . . catch the glow-worm, carry it home . . . in a box, and find it next morning nothing but a little grey worm; let the poet or the lover of poetry visit it at evening, when . . . it has built itself a palace of emerald light.⁴

Especially the truly great poet, "the poet of nature," says Hazlitt, "through the truth, depth, and harmony of his mind, sees things in their eternal beauty, for he sees them as they

²Ibid.
³Works, V, 3. Hazlitt's term is "fancy" rather than "imagination" in the passage quoted above. In a succeeding chapter, I will discuss Hazlitt's use of "fancy" and "imagination" as synonyms.
⁴Ibid., p. 9.
are." (Italics mine.) If then, as Elisabeth Schneider says, Hazlitt does not attribute to the "imagination" the power to "give man's knowledge an objective validity beyond human sensuous experience," nor enable man "to apprehend deity or universal reality," it does afford him intuitive knowledge of eternal values, such as beauty, harmony, and power.¹

It is not surprising, therefore, to find Hazlitt saying that "wherever there is a sense of beauty, or power, or harmony, as in the motion of a wave of the sea, ... there is poetry, in its birth."² This loose identification of poetry with the motion of a wave provides one necessary clue to Hazlitt's conception of the function of the "imagination" in the perception of reality. Whitehead again suggests the intellectual tradition, explaining particularly what the Romantic poets found lacking in the eighteenth century scientific scheme: Nature, God, and man had all been reduced to mere mechanism, to matter in motion.³ The Principles of Human Action gives evidence that Hazlitt repudiated a mechanistic conception of man's mind as it relates to man's behavior. Hazlitt is equally concerned, I think, to restore life to nature through a true account of the character of the mind in perception. And he is also aware of a deficiency

²Works, V, 1.
³Whitehead, p. 109.
described by Whitehead as follows: "It is the defect of the eighteenth century scientific scheme that it provides none of the elements which compose the immediate psychological experiences of mankind."¹ But Hazlitt's "imagination" is a psychological faculty which does account for immediate psychological experience; and it addresses itself to the side of nature neglected by science. "Judgment" and "reason" address themselves to water as particles in motion; "imagination" addresses itself to water as it manifests beauty, power, and harmony, as in the motion of a wave of the sea.

Thus, the "imagination" is obviously the faculty which makes poetry possible; and it becomes clear that the poetical and the scientific are conceived as differing but equally valid modes of interpreting the truths which can be gleaned from nature. The simple phenomenon of the glow-worm, as has already been seen, may be interpreted according either to its poetic (imaginative) or scientific (reasonable) aspect. Of the poetic view, Hazlitt says, "this is also one part of nature, one appearance which the glow-worm presents, and that not the least interesting."² Hazlitt further characterizes the poetic view of nature: "For the end and use of poetry '... [Is] to hold the mirror up to nature,' seen through the medium of passion and imagination, not divested of that medium by means of literal truth or abstract reason."³

The truths of science and of poetry, being different in kind,

¹Whitehead, p. 128.
require differing modes of expression.

Let who will strip nature of the colours and the shapes of fancy, the poet is not bound to do so; the impressions of common sense and strong imagination, that is, of passion and indifference, cannot be the same, and they must have a separate language to do justice to either.¹

Hazlitt emphasizes the truth and validity of the perceptions of "imagination." "This language of poetry is not the less true to nature, because it is false in point of fact; but so much the more true and natural, if it conveys the impression which the object under the influence of passion makes on the mind."²

We come next to a consideration of the objectivity of imaginative perceptions and of the means by which this objectivity is attained. Calling attention to Hazlitt's "confidence in the reality of what is immediately experienced," John Bullitt explains that Hazlitt conceived the "imagination" as a faculty capable of intuitively grasping the concrete truths of immediate experience.³ He further points out that in Hazlitt's thought "imagination" is distinguished from "reason" because it concerns itself with the concrete and the particular, while "reason" concerns itself with the abstract and the general—analyzing and abstracting qualities and categories from certain objects, giving them a certain fixity. Therefore, "science depends on the discursive or extensive

¹Works, V, 8.
²Ibid., p. 4. Hazlitt means, of course, the impression the object makes on the mind when the mind is under the influence of passion.
³P. 343.
art on the intuitive and intensive powers of mind."¹

One of these "intensive powers" is the power of association. William K. Wimsatt and Cleanth Brooks, in their treatment of the historical development of the romantic imagination, explain how the idea of association offered a means of "putting back together the world which had been fragmented into atoms or moments of discrete experience by the Humean dissociation."²

Association was a potent faculty for making combinations, for seeing objects, not thin and meager as they are rendered by abstraction, but in the whole richness of their concrete significance or of some particular significance they may have in a given situation.³

Bullitt explains the working of the associative process, with reference to Hazlitt's thought on the subject.

Associationists in the eighteenth century had gradually shown that various impressions which recall each other in a series may, as Hazlitt said, 'drop the intermediate links.' If one's early experience of A is followed by B, and B by C, B may later lapse as a link. A will then recall C directly or even fuse with it in a single impression.⁴

Hazlitt praises Shakespeare, significantly, for simultaneously presenting the past and present of certain characters to his audience in one single fused impression. In The Tempest, the adult and the infant Miranda become simultaneously present in the minds of the audience, as well as in the mind of Prospero.

¹Ibid.


³Ibid. ⁴p. 351.
A word, an epithet paints a whole scene, or throws us back whole years in the history of the person represented. So . . . when Prospero describes himself as left alone in the boat with his daughter, the epithet which he applies to her, 'Me and thy crying self,' flings the imagination instantly back from the grown woman to the helpless condition of infancy.1

Hazlitt also frequently refers to the "coalescence" of impressions, and uses "to coalesce" as a critical term. For example, he speaks of Shakespeare's images as "they coalesce the more indissolubly together."2 Wimsatt and Brooks point out that "coalescence" in late eighteenth century criticism referred to the "fusion" or "synthesis" of impressions into "a special and irreducible whole."3 This is the process by which we know syllables composed of letters, words composed of syllables, and a lump of sugar as a white, sweet, hard, and angular somewhat.4 Bullitt states the importance of the idea of "coalescence" to Hazlitt's thought:

The first important development of the theory of "coalescence appeared in Abraham Tucker's "Light of Nature Pursued" (1768-78). Hazlitt was so enamored of this work that he abridged and edited it in 1807. He afterwards appears to have taken Tucker's doctrine for granted, not only as a true associational factor, but as a basic characteristic of the mind in perception.5

The doctrine of coalescence is significant in its implication that although moulded by experience, the "imagination" is essentially an active rather than a passive faculty. For one thing, coalescence does not reduce perception to a mere reflex action or mechanically developed series

1Works, v, 48. 2Ibid., p. 54. 3p. 305.
4Ibid. 5p. 351.
of habits. In the second place, coalescence does not con-
fine the imaginative function to a receiving and combining of
sense impressions only, but extends its fusing power to "any
two subjects whatever" regardless of their source. The
"imagination" is conceived in coalescence as actively impos-
ing form upon the chaos of sense impression, and of giving
order and consistency to man's experience of nature. Most
important, the "imagination" becomes objective and truthful
in its interpretation of experience by virtue of its power
of synthesis or "coalescence." "For no true idea can be had
unless several impressions are welded together into 'a mixed
mode,' subject to a particular sort of undefinable tact."

The "imagination" attains objectivity in a second
way by virtue of its power of sympathetic identification.
This sympathetic power reveals another aspect of nature which
is known to immediate experience, but remains unaccounted for
by abstract reason and scientific investigation. "The strong
excitement of sympathy . . . leads the imagination to under-
stand the fluid realities of nature as reason never could."
We are not surprised to find, therefore, that poetry "describes
the flowing, not the fixed." Some of Hazlitt's remarks on
Shakespeare's characters illustrate his interest in the fluid,
the dynamic, the internal. For example, Hazlitt compares

1P. 353. 2P. 351.
3Bullitt quotes Hazlitt, p. 352.
4Bullitt quotes Hazlitt, p. 360.
5Works, V, 3.
Shakespeare's dramatically represented characters with Chaucer's statically represented "fixed essences" of character.

There is a continual composition and decomposition of its elements, a fermentation of every particle in the whole mass, by its alternate affinity or antipathy to other principles which are brought in contact with it. Till the experiment is tried, we do not know the result, the turn which the character will take in its new circumstances.¹

A similar interest is reflected in the following:

When Shakespeare conceived of a character, whether real or imaginary, he not only entered into all its thoughts and feelings, but seemed instantly to be surrounded with all the same objects . . . the same local, outward, and unforeseen accidents which would occur in reality.²

Likewise the attribute of events which Hazlitt finds particularly interesting is their aspect of flux and change. Poetry is superior to painting because painting can give only a single event, while poetry can give the progress of events.³ Enthusiastically praising Othello, Hazlitt says that "every instant teems with fate. We know the results, we see the process."⁴ (Italics mine.)

Bullitt stresses the importance of the concept of sympathetic identification to Hazlitt's criticism as a whole: Hazlitt's demonstration of the power of imaginative sympathy to identify itself with whatever came before it is one of his main contributions to English romantic criticism.⁵ And Bullitt feels that Hazlitt assumed the existence of this

power so completely that "it became the focal point of his critical . . . outlook."\(^1\)

It is finally necessary to emphasize that in Hazlitt's thought, the "imagination" achieves objectivity to the degree that strong passion lends it power, impelling its operations outward. Only the passionate "imagination" is capable of achieving sympathetic identification, and likewise only the passionate imagination has the fusing power which leads to a true conception.\(^2\) Hazlitt usually identifies the passionate imagination by the epithet "sympathetic." And it will be seen in a later chapter that not all the individual poets whom Hazlitt identifies as poets of "imagination" are poets of passionate or "sympathetic imagination," at least in the same degree.

It seems to me that in addition to its moral and intuitive powers, the "imagination" has some specifically poetic functions. For example, the "imagination" affords almost simultaneously with the power of perception, the power to express or represent the perception. Milton "forms the most intense conceptions of things, and then embodies them by a single stroke of his pen."\(^3\) The following passage from "On Poetry in General" applies the "imagination" to a particularly creative problem.

\[\text{Poetry}\] is strictly the language of the imagination;

\(^{1}\)P. 354.

\(^{2}\)Cf. Bullitt, pp. 357-58; and Bate, Prefaces, p. 129.

\(^{3}\)Works, IV, 38.
and the imagination is that faculty which represents objects not as they are in themselves, but as they are moulded by other thoughts and feelings into an infinite variety of shapes and combinations of power.¹

(italics mine.)

Or again, when Hazlitt speaks of the four greatest English poets (Chaucer, Spenser, Shakespeare, and Milton), he says, "as poets . . . imagination, that is, the power of feigning things according to nature, was common to them all."² I believe it would not be wrong to infer that the "imagination" is responsible for the verisimilitude mentioned here: "By an art like that of the ventriloquist, the poet throws his imagination out of himself, and makes every word appear to proceed from the mouth of the person in whose name it is given."³ Bullitt's article contains a statement which indicates the importance of the "imagination" to the creation of an art work. It is not through rules, or the "frigid observation of details in themselves," but through imaginative sympathy alone that that "expression which Hazlitt valued so highly is to be caught and real imitation to be had."⁴

"'This is the true imagination,' said Hazlitt, 'to put yourself in the place of others and to feel and speak for them.'"⁵ (italics mine.)

Sometimes Hazlitt refers to the power of "imagination" as a power over language. When Shakespeare's "imagination" was fired to a high pitch, his words "have all the truth and

¹Works, V, 3. ²Ibid., p. 46.
³Bullitt quotes Hazlitt, p. 359.
⁴Ibid., p. 361. ⁵Ibid.
vividness which arise from an actual impression of the objects." And Shakespeare's "imagination" could be said to produce the symbols, or to use Hazlitt's words, "hieroglyphics" of thought.

His epithets and single phrases are like sparkles, thrown off from an imagination, fired by the whirling rapidity of its own motion. . . . It translates thoughts into visible images . . . These remarks . . . are strictly applicable only to the impassioned parts of Shakespeare's language, which flowed from the warmth and originality of his imagination and were his own.² (Italics mine.)

It seems to me that occasionally Hazlitt uses the synthetic quality of the "imagination" to refer to poetic activity in the limited sense of that phrase (i.e., as the activity of composition) rather than in the broader one, which is perhaps equally typical of Hazlitt's usage (i.e., as perception of a certain kind). At any rate, "coalescence" at times is descriptive of a distinctly literary phenomenon. Milton, although an imitator of the ancients, is still praised for his literary originality because "the power of his mind is stamped on every line. The fervour of his imagination melts down and renders malleable, as in a furnace, the most contradictory materials."³ Or,

Shakespeare's imagination is of the same plastic kind. . . . Its movement is rapid and devious. It unites the most opposite extremes . . . He brings together images the most alike, but placed at the greatest distance from each other; that is, found in circumstances of the greatest dissimilitude. From the remoteness of his combinations, and the celerity with which they are effected, they coalesce the more indissolubly together.⁴ (Italics mine.)

¹Works, V, 54. ²Ibid., pp. 54-55. ³Ibid., p. 58. ⁴Ibid., pp. 53-54.
Most important for the purpose of comparison with the other faculties, however, is that the activity of the "imagination" leads to morality in behavior and truth in perception. The "imagination" relates man to man through sympathy; and it relates man to nature through the high degree of objective truthfulness which its intuitive perceptions afford. The "imagination" affirms the validity of the less tangible, more purely aesthetic powers in nature; and it is the most reliable interpreter of the concrete and particular world of direct experience. The "imagination" is intimately allied with poetry (poetry being sometimes its synonym); and finally, it is a necessary element in the creative process.

Hazlitt's Treatment of Fancy

Hazlitt does not have a concept of "fancy" in the same way he has a conception of the "imagination" and a conception of "wit." He uses the term frequently, but never formally explains it as he does the other two, and on the surface, at least, shows little interest in making critical or philosophical use of a distinction between "fancy" and "imagination." As Elisabeth Schneider says, Hazlitt "uses the terms interchangeably for the most part." There is no doubt, however, that Hazlitt was aware of the current use of the distinction for the purposes of literary criticism; and

1Schneider, p. 103n.

2Ibid., p. 103. Miss Schneider cites Hazlitt's refusal, in his review of the Biographia Literaria, to discuss Coleridge's distinction between these terms.
in one passage where Hazlitt apparently is adopting from Coleridge, he explicitly states that "the poetry of fancy" is inferior to the "poetry of the imagination."¹

In spite of the fact that Hazlitt commonly uses "imagination" and "fancy" as synonyms, I still feel that "fancy" holds a distinctly inferior position in Hazlitt's thought. The reason is this: Hazlitt usually reserves the term "imagination" to express those meanings of the faculty which denote its truth, seriousness, and dignity; while he usually reserves the term "fancy" to express those meanings which suggest its lightness and frivolity. When the "imagination" is allied with strong passion, the result is sympathetic identification, the perception of truth, and moral improvement. Although strong passion does not always or necessarily accompany imaginative perceptions, the occasion is rare when Hazlitt makes the kind of statement which follows: "He would realize all the fictions of a lawless imagination."² (Italics mine.) But "fancy" very often appears to be lawless, trivial, or untrue.

In discussing the evolution of the distinction between the terms "fancy" and "imagination," G. G. Watson says that although in the beginning "no essential difference existed between the two words, 'fancy' was used to represent the inferior

¹ Works, V, 82.
² Ibid., VI, 203.
senses of their common definition."\(^1\)

If the concept so formed were capricious or mistaken or lying, fancy was from the beginning the more likely word of the two, and it would be difficult to find in any writer from the fourteenth century to the seventeenth a use of the word that is not derogatory or condescending at the least.\(^2\)

Hazlitt, of course, uses "fancy" to represent the superior senses as well as the inferior. But he seems to remain in the old tradition at least to a certain extent. I believe Hazlitt limited "fancy" to only two or three of the superior meanings it might have had.

Hazlitt allows to "fancy" equally with the "imagination" the perception of natural beauty, the poetic view of nature: "Let who will strip nature of the colours and shapes of fancy, the poet is not bound to do so; the impressions of common sense and strong imagination . . . cannot be the same."\(^3\) In another passage, he says, "the poetical impression of any object is that uneasy, exquisite sense of beauty or power . . . that strives to link itself to some other image of kindred beauty or grandeur; to enshrine itself . . . in the highest forms of fancy."\(^4\) The "imagination" functions in the same way. "\(^{\text{Poetry}}\) does not define the limits of sense, or analyze the distinctions of the understanding, but signifies the excess of the imagination beyond the actual or


\(^2\)Ibid. \(^3\)Works, V, 8. \(^4\)Ibid., p. 3.
ordinary impression of any object."¹ "Imagination" and "fancy" also have equivalent meanings in that both represent things not immediately present to the senses: "The province of the imagination is principally the visionary, the unknown and undefined."² And, likewise, "we can only fancy what we do not know."³ "Fancy" rarely appears in company with passion and strong feeling. (We know, of course, that the "imagination" frequently does.) It is not often that Hazlitt says, "Poetry is the high-wrought enthusiasm of fancy and feeling."⁴

In fact, the clearest evidence of the inferiority of "fancy" in Hazlitt's mind comes from his use of the term in contexts which dissociate it from passion and feeling. "Fancy" frequently appears in company with "wit"--the "unfeeling faculty" as it will be later shown. "The Rape of the Lock is a double-refined essence of wit and fancy."⁵ Waller has "fancy," "wit," and "elegance of style" at his command.⁶ Rochester's "fancy" is "keen and caustic."⁷

The perceptions of the passionate "imagination" tend toward objective truthfulness. The visions of the "fancy" seem to reflect only subjective wanderings, sometimes into a false world of dreams. "The mixture of fancy and reality in the Pilgrim's Progress was never equalled in any allegory."⁸ Swift "endeavored to escape from the persecution of realities

¹ Works, V, 3. ² Ibid., p. 9. ³ Ibid. ⁴ Ibid., p. 4. ⁵ Ibid., p. 73. ⁶ Ibid., IX, 237. ⁷ Ibid., p. 238. ⁸ Ibid., V, 14.
into the regions of fancy."¹ The Metaphysicals "made a point
of twisting and torturing almost every subject they took in
hand, till they had fitted it to the mould of their self-
opinion and the previous fabrications of their own fancy."²

Hazlitt commonly attaches epithets to "fancy," associ-
ating it with uncontrollability and irresponsibility; he
rarely, if ever, attaches these to the "imagination." Fancy
is "sportive,"³ "exuberant,"⁴ "truant";⁵ it "pirouettes"⁶
and "run[s] on before the writer."⁷ Finally, "fancy" is
gay, capricious, and trivial. Hazlitt frequently connects
it with light amusement, as "furnishing matter for innocent
mirth,"⁸ or as supplying "the genial spirit of enjoyment."⁹
Hazlitt's association of "fancy" with sensuality will be dis-
cussed at length in a later chapter. For the present, it
must suffice to mention that Hazlitt speaks deprecatingly of
poetry which depends upon "the flattering support of sense
and fancy."¹⁰

Although Spenser is classified as a poet of "imagi-
nation," still Hazlitt uses "fancy" with notable frequency
for the purpose of describing and categorizing Spenser's
poetry. The reason for this is, I think, that Hazlitt sees
much sensuous beauty in the poetry of Spenser, but little of
the humanity he sees in that of Shakespeare. "Fancy" may

¹Works, V, 112. ²Ibid., VI, 51. ³Ibid., V, 88.
⁴Ibid., p. 35. ⁵Ibid., VI, 72. ⁶Ibid., p. 53.
⁷Ibid., V, 15. ⁸Ibid., VI, 36. ⁹Ibid., p. 41.
¹⁰Ibid., XVI, 414.
paint a faery world, and even an imagery true to nature, but somehow it cannot reveal the depths of the human heart as "imagination" can.

Hazlitt considers "fancy" inferior to "imagination," then, but it is still necessary to emphasize that Hazlitt's treatment of "fancy" is a highly unstable one. Hazlitt never defines "fancy," and throughout his work he uses it loosely, ambiguously, and (unfortunately) frequently. The variations in meaning are great, ranging from almost no identifiable meaning at all to equivalence with "imagination."

**Hazlitt's Conception of Wit**

In their discussion of neo-classic "wit," Wimsatt and Brooks point to the manner in which the meaning of the term "wit" had undergone a process of pejoration by the close of the eighteenth century. Whereas in the days of Dryden and Cowley "wit [came] to be almost equivalent to poetry itself or to the main principle of poetry,"\(^1\) by the time of Johnson "the word 'wit' was well on the way to becoming only a relic of serious criticism."\(^2\)

According to Wimsatt and Brooks' explanation, the "wit" which was the principle of poetic invention in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries tended first toward synonymity with "imagination" and denoted a "faculty of seeing difficult resemblances between largely unlike objects."\(^3\)

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\(^1\) Wimsatt and Brooks, p. 229.


This faculty, of course, is the "wit" of metaphysical poetry. With the growing prestige of scientific fact, and the consequent stress laid upon the identity of the word with the thing it represented, "wit" became associated also with "judgment," a faculty which discerned differences and made distinctions. Particularly in these early significations, "wit" has connotations of reliability, and of some degree of truth to nature. But while "judgment" was allied with science and hard facts, "wit" was allied with poetry and rhetoric, and in consequence, Wimsatt and Brooks imply, gradually lost its respectability.

Although no direct cause-and-effect relationship is argued, it seems important for the fate of "wit" that according to the Ramist revision of the science, rhetoric ceased to be considered as dealing directly with nature. Ramus "took invention, disposition, and memory away from rhetoric and gave them . . . to dialectic, leaving to rhetoric proper only elocution (that is, style) and delivery."\(^1\) As a result, rhetoric became limited in its concern to those ornamental figures and tropes, considered pleasant although seriously misleading by the modern scientists. Likewise, neo-classic "wit" seems to have become increasingly limited in its significance, and in a similar way. Dryden, in early works, associated "wit" with memory and invention, but later defined "wit" merely as "a propriety of thoughts and words; or, in other terms, thought and words elegantly adapted to the

\(^1\)Ibid., p. 223.
Wimsatt and Brooks consider Pope's "true wit is Nature to advantage dressed" an expression of a last attempt to reconcile classical rhetoric with dialectic, poetic ornament with truth. "Pope's main statement about rhetoric will turn out to be a prescription for some kind of improving conjunction . . . between the 'wit' of rhetoric and the 'nature' it deals with."\(^1\) But "wit" becomes increasingly separated from its favorable connotations, and gradually divorced not only from nature, but from poetry too.

From Pope's time, "wit" was on its way toward becoming a term of actual disapprobation. As a kind of "genteel slang word" "wit" referred, among other things, to the "witty man of the salon, the master of elegance in conversation."\(^3\) An increasing disrespect for the term grew out of its association with genteel elegance, since the rising middle class saw "wit" with its connotations of frivolous leisure as "soft, loose, degenerate, insane, . . . wanting the 'noble roughness' of the British temper."\(^4\) Toward the end of the century, "wit" almost disappears as a principle of poetic invention, and becomes strictly limited in its associations to the more disagreeable expressions of the comic spirit.

As the wit which was equated with poetry . . . sank before certain kinds of pre-romantic imagination, the wit of the comic became associated with the more disagreeable and trivial forms of laughter, with raillery, ridicule, and nasty satire. . . . During the 18th century such associations seem to have gained ground,

\(^1\)Wimsatt and Brooks quote Dryden, p. 230.
\(^2\)Ibid., p. 237. \(^3\)Ibid., p. 241. \(^4\)Ibid.
until the term "wit" assumed something like the vague and degraded meaning which is still popular in the 29th century—a form of the ludicrous more smart than humour.¹

It might seem that Hazlitt's conception of "wit" would fit the late eighteenth century conception of the term as described by Wimsatt and Brooks, and to a limited extent it does belong to that category. However, in Hazlitt's usage, "wit" reassumes in a slightly altered manner some of its earlier neo-classic meanings and becomes once more a respectable critical term. Although it is a distinctly inferior poetic principle when one compares its operations to those of the "imagination," still it accounts for the creation, if not of the very greatest English poetry, still of much poetry and drama which ranks just below the greatest. And thus, although "wit" is associated with laughter, and therefore shares the strict limitation of meaning and some of the general degradation of meaning which the word endured, it has had much dignity restored to it too.

First, it is necessary to mention some of the disagreeable associations of "wit" which appear in Hazlitt's writing. "Wit" can refer to trivial forms of expression such as puns and smart repartee. It is ill-natured: "Wit has no feeling but contempt."² It "hovers round the borders of the light and trifling."³ The "poetry of wit" must involve a decline from the "poetry of the imagination" because "wit and humour... appeal to our indolence, our vanity, our

¹Ibid., p. 243. ²Works, XX, 360. ³Ibid., VI, 15.
weakness, and insensibility; serious and impassioned poetry appeals to our strength, our magnanimity, our virtue, and humanity."¹

In Hazlitt's criticism, the term once used to denote poetry itself has become associated to a certain extent with the "wit" of the comic. A glance at the title, "On Wit and Humour," tells the reader that Hazlitt, at least in one essay, will be using "wit" in a familiar modern sense. The structure of this essay helps establish in the reader's mind an association between "wit" and laughter, because the first thirteen paragraphs have laughter for their subject; "wit" is taken up as a special rhetorical phase of the more general subject. Hazlitt must have taken this special association for granted, since he used "wit" as a synonym for comic humour before he formally introduces the subject of "wit" in the fourteenth paragraph. Although the association of "wit" with the laughable is never entirely absent in Hazlitt, it is not always as dominant as in "On Wit and Humour." There is little concern with the laughable in "A Definition of Wit" where in one place Hazlitt says, "There need not be laughter, but there must be deception and surprise: otherwise, there can be no wit."² Finally, in the discussion of the poetry of Pope, in whose "smooth and polished verse" we meet "miracles of wit,"³ there is no mention of laughter or of comic effects. Instead, for the purposes of his analysis,

¹Works, VI, 23. ²Ibid., XX, 358. ³Ibid., V, 71.
Hazlitt makes use of the various other properties with which he has endowed "wit" to make it both a significant psychological faculty and a useful tool for the evaluation and analysis of poetry.

To understand these broader meanings of "wit" most clearly, it is necessary to see "wit" as it compares and contrasts with the highest principle of poetic creation, the "imagination." For although the powers of "wit" differ from those of the "imagination," "wit" is in many ways a faculty similar to the "imagination" in kind, if not in its purposes and effects.

In defining "wit," as in defining "imagination," Hazlitt continues his attack on the mechanist psychology of Hobbes and Locke. C. D. Thorpe, in The Aesthetic Theory of Thomas Hobbes, explains that Hazlitt objected to "what he felt was Hobbes' impossible theory that the mind could have only one idea at a time."1 Although Hazlitt does not mention Hobbes by name, he does object to exactly this theory in "A Definition of Wit."

If all our ideas were literal, physical, confined to a single impression of the object, there could be no faculty for, or possibility of, the existence of wit, for its first principle is mocking or making a jest of anything, and its first condition or postulate, therefore, is the distinction between jest and earnest.2

Several other of Hazlitt's objections to Hobbes are relevant

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2Works, XX, 359.
to his analysis of the function of "wit." In an essay on Hobbes, Hazlitt enumerates ten principles of Hobbes' philosophy which he intends to make it his business to oppose "to the utmost of his ability." Among the more important ones to the present discussion are:

1. That all our ideas are derived from external objects, by means of the senses alone.
2. That as nothing exists out of the mind but matter and motion, so it is itself with all its operations nothing but matter and motion.
3. That thoughts are single, or that we can think of only one object at a time. In other words, that there is no comprehensive power or faculty of understanding in the mind.

In Hazlitt's opposing scheme, "wit" and "imagination" are both voluntary, not passive faculties, and both make possible creative, purposeful manipulations of ideas, although their manipulations are different because of the difference in purpose involved. A comprehensive intellectual faculty, the "understanding," exists, without whose initial power neither "wit" nor "imagination" could operate in a meaningful way. For the "understanding" is necessary in Hazlitt's scheme to make the ideas possible which "wit" and "imagination" treat in their respective ways. Thorpe's explanation of the role of the "understanding" in Hazlitt's psychology is lengthy, but I believe it is worth quoting.

A sensation is the perception produced by the

1Works, II, 145.  2Ibid., pp. 144-45.
impression of several parts of an outward object, each by itself, on the corresponding parts of a sentient being; by an idea I mean the conception produced by a number of these together on the same conscious principle. This principle is the 'understanding,' the 'superintending faculty' which alone perceives the relations of things. . . . The operation of this faculty presupposes more than one idea in the mind at a time; indeed, if the mind cannot have two ideas at a time it can never have any, since all the ideas we know consist of more than one. Our idea of a table, for instance, is made up of a variety of ingredients furnished by the senses: hardness, color, shape, use, and so forth. But without the surrounding and forming power of intellect we could never have a unified idea of a single object. 1

Now in his definition of "wit," Hazlitt says that "ideas exist as a sort of fixtures in the understanding; they are like moveables (that will also unscrew or take to pieces) in the wit or fancy." 2 Also, things exist in the mind in the same way words do; i. e., as a word can exist in the mind without our being perpetually aware of the letters, or parts making up the whole. These parts "are connected and cohere together by habit and circumstances in certain sets of association." 3 As one of the distinctive powers of the "imagination" was to fuse ideas into natural and significant associative clusters, the corresponding distinctive power of "wit" is to dissociate the ideas of the "understanding" from one another; to alter and disturb that fusion of sense impressions constituting a single idea; and by a variety of means to resolve either a cluster of ideas or a single idea into two or more conceptual parts. (Puns and other plays on words

1Thorpe, p. 120. 2wrake, XX, 353. 3Ibid., pp. 355-56.
particularly have this effect.) Some of Hazlitt's statements on the power of "wit" to disjoin ideas are the following:

The faculty by which this is done is the rapid, careless decomposition and recomposition of our ideas, by means of which we can easily and clearly detach certain links in the chain of our associations from the place where they stand, and where they have an infirm footing, and join them on to others, to show how little intimacy they had with the former set.\(^1\)

Wit is the dividing a sentence or an object into a number of constituent parts, as suddenly and with the same vivacity of apprehension to compound them again with other objects, "wherein the most distant resemblance or the most partial coincidence may be found."\(^2\)

Wit then, according to this account of it, depends on the rapid analysis or solution of continuity in our ideas, which, by detaching, puts them into a condition to coalesce more readily with others, and form new and unexpected combinations.\(^3\)

As the quotations above indicate, "wit" not only divides. Equally important is its power to join ideas together. Instead of fusing ideas together as the "imagination" does however, "wit" merely juxtaposes them. As a matter of fact, "wit" usually achieves its effect as a result of the incongruous, unnatural juxtaposition of ideas which it effects. When "wit" makes its comparisons, it finds some "casual and partial coincidence which has nothing to do, ... with the nature of the things."\(^4\) "Wit is the putting together in jest, ... ideas between which there is a serious, i. e. customary incompatibility, and by this pretended

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\(^1\) Works, XX, 362.  
\(^2\) Ibid., p. 352.  
\(^3\) Ibid., p. 354.  
\(^4\) Ibid., VI, 19.
union, . . . to point out more strongly some lurking incongruity."\(^1\) Or,

wit is the conjuring up in the fancy any illustration of an idea by likeness, combination of images, or by a form of words, that being intended to point out the eccentricality . . . does so by referring it . . . to a totally opposite class, where the surprise . . . proves the inherent want of congruity.\(^2\)

A more marked contrast between "wit" and "imagination" regards sympathy. "Imagination" when combined with passion is the sympathetic power of the mind. "Wit," however, describes "the eloquence of indifference."\(^3\) At least partially because of its connection with laughter, "wit" depends on aloofness in order to operate--for laughter and sympathy are incompatible. "We burst into laughter from want of sympathy with that which is unreasonable and unnecessary."\(^4\) And, "in general . . . we only laugh at those misfortunes in which we are spectators, not sharers."\(^5\) "Wit" can not be sympathetic and still achieve its purpose which is usually to point out faults and absurdities and to deflate and degrade both the great and the small. The sympathetic quality of the "imagination" makes it potentially a faculty which best inspires moral behavior. Even if "wit" is by nature unsympathetic it is not necessarily the inspiration of vicious behavior, although it conceivably might be. "Wit," as a matter of fact, has both a salutary and an unsalutary effect in this regard, and Hazlitt's attitude toward "wit" is,

\(^1\) Works, XX, 352. \(^2\) Ibid., p. 360. \(^3\) Ibid., VI, 15. \(^4\) Ibid., p. 5. \(^5\) Ibid., p. 9.
perhaps for this reason, an ambiguous one.

More often than not, the tone of Hazlitt's remarks is critical when he speaks of the unsympathetic nature of "wit." Laughter is provoked by lack of sympathy with the "unreasonable and unnecessary." Certain follies and absurdities make claims upon our sympathies which are false. "If every vanity or weakness in another gave us a sensible pang, it would be hard indeed." Then too, there are various kinds of laughter, some of which are more pleasant than others. As the element of volition becomes more pronounced in the object of laughter (such as in a person who willfully seeks to do an absurd thing) and in the observer, who by becoming aware of the absurdity becomes an intentional critic, the disagreeable element increases.

The third sort, or the ridiculous arising out of absurdity as well as improbability, that is, where the defect or weakness is of a man's own seeking, is the most refined of all, but not always so pleasant as the last, because the same contempt and disapprobation which sharpens and subtilises our sense of the impropriety, adds a severity to it inconsistent with perfect ease and enjoyment. This last species is properly the province of satire.

"Wit" is more closely akin to satiric humour than to either of the two other "degrees of the laughable" defined by Hazlitt. The object of "wit" and satire is ridicule, or at least a pointing out of absurdity, and therefore satiric and witty remarks are always made voluntarily with an eye to producing special effects. Hazlitt frequently insists that

1Works, VI, 5. 2Ibid. 3Ibid., p. 8.
"wit" is conscious in its operations. Its voluntary and rhetorical quality particularly distinguishes "wit" from laughter and the gentler forms of humour. "Humour is . . . the growth of nature and accident; wit is the product of art and fancy."¹ (Laughter is an involuntary response and can result from an effect involuntarily produced.)² In spite of the unpleasantness of the laughter which satire provokes, Hazlitt admits satire to be "the most refined" and also "the most enduring" form of the laughable;³ and there are a few things which should be satirized.

We laugh at fools, and at those who pretend to be wise—at extreme simplicity, awkwardness, hypocrisy, and affectation. . . . Lord Foppington's insensibility to ridicule, and airs of ineffable self-conceit, are no less admirable; and Joseph Surface's cant maxims of morality, when once disarmed of their power to do hurt, become sufficiently ludicrous.⁴ Comedy is not only morally justifiable, but has a good moral effect on mankind. The exposure of hypocrisy in Wycherley's Plain Dealer is a "discipline of humanity" because of the indignation it excites against "this odious and pernicious quality."⁵ Hazlitt says further of the Plain Dealer that "no one can read this play attentively without being the better for it as long as he lives."⁶ Also, there are periods when society as a whole needs the discipline of "wit" and satire because it has become permeated with folly, pretense, and affectation.

In a word, it is when folly is epidemic, and vice worn

¹Works, VI, 15. ²Ibid., p. 7. ³Ibid., p. 8. ⁴Ibid., p. 9. ⁵Ibid., p. 78. ⁶Ibid.
as a mark of distinction, that all the malice of wit and humour is called out and justified to detect the imposture, and prevent the contagion from spreading. The fools in Wycherley and Congreve are of their own, or one another's making, and deserve to be well scourged into common sense and decency.1

Although some great satirists use "wit" as the instrument of their moral vision, the fact of their doing so does not alter the basic character of "wit," whose favorite employment is "to add littleness to littleness, and heap contempt on insignificance by all the arts of petty and incessant warfare."2 When Hazlitt compares this sort of unsympathetic activity of "wit" with the sympathetic quality of the "imagination," his attitude toward "wit" is clearly negative.

Wit, as distinguished from poetry, is the imagination or fancy inverted, and so applied to given objects, as to make the little look less, the mean more light and worthless; or to divert our admiration or wean our affections from that which is lofty and impressive, instead of producing a more intense admiration and exalted passion, as poetry does.3

And condescension is even "easier" than sympathy.

The object of ludicrous poetry is naturally to let down and lessen; and it is easier to let down than to raise up, to weaken than to strengthen, to disconnect our sympathy from passion and power, than to attach and rivet it to any object of grandeur or interest.4

Actually, the most reprehensible quality of "wit" is that it may cultivate a bad habit of mind in both writer and reader. A cultivation of the "imagination," an extension of the sympathies, naturally results in benevolent feeling

1Works, VI, 35. 2Ibid., p. 15. 3Ibid. 4Ibid., p. 23.
and action. But since "wit" is a voluntary act of the mind "shewing the absurd and ludicrous consciously"¹ there is a moral danger in making a habit of seeking out the absurdities in one's fellow men. Speaking of those who would try to be perpetually witty, Hazlitt says, "An affectation of wit by degrees hardens the heart."² And elsewhere, we have seen Hazlitt say that "wit" appeals to our vanity and insensibility. 

The "imagination," by virtue of its powers of sympathetic identification, and its ability to fuse related impressions into a single whole, perceives truth as the human being under the influence of strong passion experiences it. In comparison to those of the "imagination," the perceptions of "wit" might almost be said to border on the false or untrue. Whereas "imagination" perceives the real associations which natural objects have with one another, "wit" always forces unreal or unnatural associations together.

The wit so far, then, consists in suggesting, or insinuating indirectly, an apparent coincidence between two things, to make the real incongruity, by the recoil of the imagination, more palpable than it could have been without this feigned and artificial approximation to an union between them. This makes the difference between jest and earnest, which is essential to all wit. It is only make-believe.³

Or,

Mere wit, as opposed to reason or argument, consists in striking out some casual and partial coincidence which has nothing to do, or at least implies no necessary connection with the nature of things, which are forced into a

¹ Works, VI, 22. ² Ibid., p. 27. ³ Ibid., XX, 358.
seeming analogy by a play upon words, or some irrelevant conceit as in puns, riddles, alliteration, etc.\textsuperscript{1}

Since "wit" is characterized by indifference rather than by sympathy, it can never express the internal character of an object as the "imagination" is able to do, but can only reflect what is external. "Wit is . . . an ingenious and striking exposition of those evanescent and glancing impressions of objects which affect us more from the surprise or contrast to the train of our ordinary and literal preconceptions."\textsuperscript{2}

However, the best "wit" has a significant relation to truth, if not of the higher type grasped by the "imagination," then of a lower sort which appears in common sense and accepted opinions. Furthermore, "wit" and laughter both have levels of seriousness. The laughable, the ludicrous, and the ridiculous are all defined according to a certain kind of contrast between expectation and reality; the most serious laughter is laughter at the ridiculous, in which the contradiction found is against sense and reason.

The lower levels of "wit" in Hazlitt's criticism are somewhat similar to Addison's "mixt wit" and "false wit," although in Hazlitt's thought almost all "wit" depends to a certain extent on devices connected with sight and sound. Alliteration is a species of "verbal wit" which calls attention to the sense of what is being said. Rhyme too is a kind of "wit."

\textsuperscript{1}Works, VI, 19.  \textsuperscript{2}Ibid., p. 15.
Rhymes are sometimes a species of wit, where there is an alternate combination and resolution or decomposition of the elements of sound, contrary to our usual division and classification of them in ordinary speech, not unlike the sudden separation and re-union of the component parts of the machinery in a pantomime.¹

But this sort of "wit," though "surprising and laughable" is not the best and most lasting. The detection of unexpected likeness or distinction in things is preferable.

That wit is most refined and effectual, which is founded on the detection of unexpected likeness or distinction in things, rather than in words. It is more severe and galling . . . though less surprising, in proportion as the thought suggested is more complete and satisfactory, from its being inherent in the nature of things themselves.²

In Hazlitt's view the best "wit" always has a firm foundation in that which is accepted to be true. Naturally, a witticism at the expense of a fault which the world did not acknowledge to be such, and which would not be universally apparent, would fail to have any marked effect. Truth must reside in the thing satirized.

A flippant jest is as good a test of truth. . . . Ridicule is necessarily built on certain supposed facts, whether true or false, and on their inconsistency with certain acknowledged maxims whether right or wrong. It is, therefore, a fair test, if not of philosophical or abstract truth, at least of what is truth according to public opinion and common sense; for it can only expose to instantaneous contempt that which is condemned by public opinion, and is hostile to the common sense of mankind.³

Finally, "wit" has a function other than that of simply ridiculing the absurd. One of its provinces, says Hazlitt, is to "penetrate through the disguise or crust with which

¹Works, VI, 21. ²Ibid., p. 22. ³Ibid., p. 20.
indolence and custom 'skin and slur over' our ideas."¹ "Wit" can dispel hardened prejudices and by its power "to resolve aggregates or bundles of things into their component parts,"² can offer fresh insight into a given object of perception, or in Hazlitt's words, can "throw a glancing and fortuitous light upon the whole."³ This function brings "wit" as close as it comes to being a faculty through which reality is directly perceived.

Hazlitt does discuss a variety of "wit" which he calls the "wit of sense and observation, which consists in the acute illustration of good sense and practical wisdom, by means of some far-fetched conceit or quaint imagery."⁴ Moral aphorisms may sparkle with "wit" and "fancy" in their mode of expression.⁵ Unfortunately for the case of "wit," Hazlitt distinguishes between matter and form here, saying that in such expressions, the matter is sense and the form is "wit."⁶ Thus "wit" is reduced to the form the sentence takes, along with other peculiarities of expression, and we seem to have returned to "verbal wit."

One argument for the "intrinsic superiority of poetry or imagination to wit," according to Hazlitt, is that poetry or "imagination" "does not admit of mere verbal combinations."⁷ There is also a broader reason. For Hazlitt has connected the realization of the highest values in both life

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and poetry with the working of the "imagination." And although "wit" can lead men to justice and to truth, it can not do so as surely and certainly, as necessarily, as "imagination" can.

Hazlitt's Conception of Reason

The first section dealt, in part, with the manner in which "reason" and "imagination" differed. The "sympathetic imagination" could penetrate beyond surface appearances and reveal, to a high degree, the true nature of an object. This nature was complex rather than simple, changing rather than static, and concrete rather than abstract. In addition, the "imagination" endowed objects with beauty, grandeur, and power. Passion united with "imagination" reveals the world of the poet. "Reason" on the other hand, discovers a static, general, and simple view of nature. And "reason" strips nature of its "fanciful pretensions" leaving a drab creation without poetic power in its stead. The simplest opposition between the two faculties, however, is that one is in tendency abstract, the other in tendency concrete.

Still, it should be recognized, I think, that an absolute opposition between the faculties is never defined. In the first place, all perceptions are necessarily abstract in Hazlitt's definition of that term.1 (For him, abstraction

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1See supra, p. 6 and pp. 18-19 for equivalent meanings of "imagination" and "fancy."
2Works, II, 191.
seems to mean any incompleteness, any imperfection, however minute, in our knowledge of the concrete.) To have a genuinely "clear and distinct" idea of an object, it would be necessary to comprehend the infinite number of particulars of which the object is composed. Also, the object would have to be compared with every other object in the class to which it belonged, and all circumstances and relations influencing the object would have to be known. "All particular things consist of, and lead to, an infinite number of other things." Since the mind in ordinary perception is incapable of grasping all these particulars, man is given "reason" or "understanding" to bring order out of what would otherwise be chaos. "Abstraction is a consequence of the limitation of the comprehensive faculty, and mixes itself more or less with every act of the mind of whatever kind, and in every moment of its existence."

Since the "sympathetic imagination" at times approximates a sort of absolute knowledge of the concrete reality, "reason" would seem to be inherently less capable of discovering truth than "imagination." Even this is not necessarily so. The "imagination" leads to approximate knowledge of the real nature of things only when it is passionate and sympathetic—and thus firmly tied to experience. "Reason" can be tied to experience too: The "reason" of the experimentalist, the natural scientist, is not too abstract for its

1 Works, II, 205. 2 Ibid., p. 206. 3 Ibid., p. 191. 4 Ibid., pp. 116-17, 151-53. 5 Ibid., p. 191.
particular purpose. It merely deprives external nature of the beauty and power bestowed upon it by "imagination" and passion.

Following the passage in "On Poetry in General" in which he distinguishes between the glow-worm as seen by the poet and the glow-worm as seen by the natural scientist, Hazlitt says that it is the "understanding" which restores things to their "natural boundaries."¹ Samuel Johnson "saw only the definite, the positive, and the practical, the average forms of things"²—and his characteristic power of mind was "common sense."³ Common sense "sympathises with the impressions of things on ordinary minds in ordinary circumstances."⁴ ("Understanding" and "common sense" are sometimes synonyms of Hazlitt's for "reason" although at times "common sense" is given a unique meaning of its own which distinguishes it from "reason."⁵ The mixture of terms is apparent in a passage from "On Poetry in General."

Nothing, therefore, can be more absurd than the outcry which has been sometimes raised by frigid and pedantic critics, for reducing the language of poetry to the standard of common sense and reason: for the end and use of poetry ... 'is to hold the mirror up to nature,' seen through the medium of passion and imagination, not divested of that medium by

¹ Works, V, 9. ² Ibid., IV, 175. ³ Ibid. ⁴ Ibid. ⁵ Ibid., VIII, 36. In Hazlitt's essay, "On Genius and Common Sense," for example, "reason" and "common sense" are opposed to one another. There, "common sense" refers to the immediate interpretation of experience, and welds associated impressions together in the same manner that the "imagination" does. Reason is identified primarily with sophistry, closing up the avenues of knowledge, and shutting the gates of wisdom on mankind.
"Reason" can be appropriate to the study of "metaphysics" (equated by Hazlitt with psychology) as long as it remains firmly grounded in experience. Hazlitt criticizes Hobbes and his French disciples for having based a psychology on only part of the experience available to them: Because they have observed the nature of matter, and ignored or disregarded the evidence afforded by experience of the non-material nature of mind, these philosophers are content in their error, as Hazlitt sees it, of transferring the laws of matter to the laws of mind.2

We have, it is true, gained much by not consulting the suggestions of our own minds in questions where they inform us of nothing; namely, in the particular laws and phenomena of the natural world; and we have hastily concluded ... that the best way to lay aside the dictates of our own consciousness, thoughts, and feelings. ... We seem to have resigned the natural use of our understandings, and to have given up our own existence as a nonentity.3 (Italics mine.)

There is a kind of "reason" then referring to the simple, matter-of-fact perceptions of either the inner or the outer world. Its view of nature is "abstract" but not objectionably so, unless a significant area of experience in relation to the object of inquiry has been omitted.

"Reason" is also characterized by its association with intentional abstractions, with "generalities, and forms, and creeds, and naked propositions."4 The mind, here picks out certain parts of sense experience, and allows these to

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1Works, V, 8. 2Ibid., II, 24. 3Ibid., p, 126
4Ibid., XII, 44.
stand for the concrete truth. Hazlitt uses the example of a map:

The representation falls short of the reality, by a million degrees, and you would omit it altogether in order to arrive at a balance of power in the non-entities of the understanding, and call this keeping within the bounds of sense and reason? and whatever does not come within those self-made limits is to be set aside as frivolous or monstrous.¹

Practical purposes may demand this sort of intentional abstraction, but Hazlitt cannot sanction a deliberate and unnecessary attempt to omit a part of concrete experience from an investigation.

The most objectionable kind of "reason" or "understanding" is that identified with narrow logic, which can operate quite successfully in a void of abstraction. Hazlitt mentions the "airy disputations" of the schoolmen as an example of this kind of abuse of the mind.² These philosophers rejected all concrete experience, and erected logical systems based on private whim and fancy, the extensions of pure self will.³

From the imperfect state of knowledge they had few facts to go by; and, intoxicated with the novelty of their vain distinctions, they would be tempted to despise the clearest and most obvious suggestions of their own minds. Hence arose 'their logomachies'—their everlasting word-fights, their sharp disputes, their captious, bootless controversies.⁴

In "The New School of Reform" Hazlitt summarizes the three possible significances of "reason." Here, a "sentimentalist" tells a "rationalist" that "reason" may

¹Works, XII, 45. ²Ibid., II, 115. ³Ibid. ⁴Ibid.
signify "dry matter of fact or reality, as distinct from sentimentality and poetry," "abstract truth, as distinct from local impressions or individual partialities," and finally "calm, inflexible self-will, as distinct from passion."¹ The "inflexible self-will" would seem, at least, to refer to the basis of logical reason. All of these, according to the sentimentalist, are "insufficient as tests and standards of \( \text{morality} \)."² This last concern seems to be the most central one for Hazlitt. "Reason" should not invade areas in which it can be of no use.

It appears . . . that there are two standards of value and modes of appreciation in human life. . . . That which is of greatest moment to the Understanding is often of little or none . . . to the Fancy, and vice versa. Why then force these two standards into one? Or make the Understanding judge of what belongs to the Fancy, any more than the Fancy judge of what belongs to the Understanding? Poetry would make bad mathematics, mathematics bad poetry: why jumble them together? Leave things, that are so, separate.³

Hazlitt is especially concerned over the tendency in his own time to transfer strictly scientific and mathematical disciplines to the areas of poetry and social philosophy, where the scientific and reasonable simply do not belong.

In Hazlitt's writing, one can also find a contrast between "reason" and "imagination" as principles of moral action.⁴ In his essay on William Godwin, Hazlitt discusses

¹Works, XII, 188. ²Ibid. ³Ibid., p. 191.

⁴Elisabeth Schneider points out that Hazlitt "goes from reason as constitutive of knowledge to reason as motivating the will, without making clear whether it is the same reason in both cases or not. See Schneider, pp. 34-35.
the inadequacy of reasonable calculation of consequences as an infallible guide to moral behavior. Men are not so constituted as to be able to act according to what their "reason" tells them to be the greatest possible good.¹ In taking "abstract reason for the rule of conduct, and abstract good for its end," Godwin made the path to virtue "dangerous, solitary and impracticable."²

He places the human mind on an elevation, from which it commands a view of the whole line of moral consequences; and requires it to conform its acts to the larger and more enlightened conscience which it has thus acquired. He absolves man from the gross and narrow ties of sense, custom, authority, private and local attachment, in order that he may devote himself to the boundless pursuit of universal benevolence. Mr. Godwin gives no quarter to the amiable weaknesses of our nature.³

The following pages will show, I think, Hazlitt's view that passion and "imagination" are more adequate guides to moral conduct than "reason" because they do take into account the whole human being, its weakness and frailty as well as its goodness. A truly infallible guide to moral behavior stirs not only the mind, but also the eye and the heart. The "imagination" contains the necessary appeals to sense and feeling which the "reason" does not.

In his essay "On Reason and Imagination," Hazlitt contrasts the validity of these two faculties particularly as they relate to "moral truth (as distinct from mathematical)."⁴ For the practical purposes of mathematical truth, Hazlitt

¹Works, XI, 20. ²Ibid., p. 18. ³Ibid., pp. 18-19. ⁴Ibid., XII, 46.
grants that it is necessary "in compliance with the infirmity of human intellect" to deal in abstractions—the squares and circles, and the maps in which "the representation falls short of the reality, by a million degrees."\(^1\) To adopt the technique of drawing maps on a graduated scale in the investigation of human nature and the problems of moral good and evil, however, is absurd.

It is, I confess, strange to me that men who pretend to more than usual accuracy in distinguishing and analyzing, should insist that in treating of human nature, of moral good and evil, the nominal differences are alone of any value, or that in describing the feelings and motives of men, anything that conveys the smallest idea of what those feelings are . . . is a deliberate attempt at artifice and delusion—as if a knowledge or representation of things as they really exist . . . was a proportionable departure from the truth.\(^2\) (Italics mine.)

Also, with respect to moral truth, if one is to discover whether a thing is good or evil, one must find "the quantity of passion, of feeling . . . connected with it, . . . and not . . . whether it is round or square."\(^3\) For example, how does one know the slave trade to be evil: It is not because its practices are illogical. Instead, they "inflame the imagination and make the heart sick. . . . This is the very test and measure of the degree of the enormity, that it involuntarily staggers and appals the mind."\(^4\)

Those who would argue for a calm, dispassionate, reasonable discussion of such social ills, who decry extravagance and enthusiasm, have, in Hazlitt's terms, "invert[ed]/

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\(^1\) Works, XII, 45.  
\(^2\) Ibid., p. 44.  
\(^3\) Ibid., p. 46.  
\(^4\) Ibid., p. 47.
the rules of moral perspective."\(^1\) The mind may "refine and abstract so much \(\text{on a given subject}\) as to attach no idea at all \(\text{to that subject}\) corresponding with \(\text{its}\) practical value or \(\text{its}\) influence on the minds of those concerned."\(^2\) Least of all should the mind refine and abstract where human beings are concerned--especially human beings who suffer unjustly. The mind of the public must be moved to sympathy, and this is best achieved by offering it concrete knowledge. Therefore, in reference to the enormities of the slave trade, "to which no words can do adequate justice,"\(^3\) an attempt must be made to abandon the diminutive, mechanical standard of the map maker, and to adopt the passion and imagination of the poet.

Are we then, in order to form a complete idea \(\text{of the enormities}\) to omit every circumstance of aggravation, or to suppress every feeling of impatience that arises out of the details, lest we should be accused of giving way to ... prejudice and passion?\(^4\)

Not only must the details be given; they must be given in a passionate manner:

A pang inflicted on humanity is not the less real, because it stirs up sympathy in the breast of humanity. Would you tame down the language of justifiable passion into that of cold indifference, of self-complacent, sceptical reasoning, and thus take the sting of indignation from the mind of the spectator?\(^5\)

The sort of "reasonable" approach to moral problems, therefore, which would have one speak in terms either of "abstract truth" or of "dry matter of fact" would be both wrong and inadequate. It neither produces the full truth of the human situation, 

\(^1\)Works, XII, 45. \(^2\)Ibid., p, 45. \(^3\)Ibid., p, 47. 
\(^4\)Ibid. \(^5\)Ibid.
nor produces the desired moral response.

The social philosophy of Hazlitt's day suffers from misapplications of "reason" in its theories. For example, Hazlitt criticizes Rousseau for being "too ambitious of an exceedingly technical and scientific mode of reasoning, scarcely attainable in the mixed questions of human life."¹ The variety and contradiction apparent to everyone in the individual human being and in human society are not susceptible of rigid treatment. Also, the social thinkers of Hazlitt's day are like the schoolmen of the middle ages. A characteristic self-absorption permits them to develop logical schemes not based in empirical reality at all, but upon the same sort of whims and fancies mentioned before. Jeremy Bentham is a social philosopher of this class:

Jeremy Bentham regards the people about him as no more than the flies of a summer. He meditates the coming age. He hears and sees only what suits his purpose, or some 'foregone conclusion'; and looks out for facts and passing occurrences in order to put them into his logical machinery and grind them into the dust and powder of some subtle theory.²

Rousseau is too absorbed in his own thoughts and feelings to be concerned with facts and the real nature of things, but he skillfully defines his position in consistent reasoning. The result is unsatisfactory, not simply because the conclusions have been arrived at through reasoning, but also because the intensity of his self-absorbed feeling narrowed his vision to "some one view."³

¹Works, XII, 52. ²Ibid., XI, 7. ³Ibid., IV, 89.
For the same intense feeling which enabled him to discern the first principles of things, and seize some one view of a subject in all its ramifications, prevented him from admitting the operation of other causes which interfered with his favorite purpose, 1 and involved him in endless willful contradictions.

As has already been seen, Hazlitt criticizes Godwin for paying insufficient attention to the "mixed questions of human life," and ignoring all but his private point of view. A false premise therefore stands beneath Godwin's system in Political Justice. The future of human society which Godwin envisages depends upon the erroneous view that human conduct is guided altogether by the rule of abstract reason, and is motivated by a universally shared desire for abstract good. "Man was indeed screwed up, by mood and figure into a logical machine, that was to forward the public good with the utmost punctuality and effect." 2 But the system was doomed because it had insufficient foundation in nature. Human failures "broke up the system, and left no good odour behind it!" 3 Thus it is that

\[\text{Godwin's}^7\] grand work is (at least) an experimentum crucis to show the weak sides and imperfections of human reason as the sole law of human action. By overshooting the mark . . . he has pointed out the limit or line of separation, between what is practicable and what is barely conceivable—by imposing impossible tasks on the naked strength of the will, he has discovered how far it is or is not in our power to dispense with the illusions of sense, to resist the calls of affection, to emancipate ourselves from the force of habit; . . . so Mr. Godwin has rendered an essential service to moral science, by attempting (in vain) to pass the Arctic Circle and Frozen Regions, where the understanding is no longer warmed by the

1Works, IV, 89. 2Ibid., XI, 20. 3Ibid., 21.
In Hazlitt's thought, literature and social philosophy share much in common. In the first place, "man" or "humanity" is their mutual subject. Because of the obvious complexity of human nature and human relationships, a serious treatment is bound to demand a great deal of attention to the concrete, and an attempt to eliminate the element of abstraction as much as possible. Generalities about human beings are worthless: "Moral and poetical truth is like expression in a picture—the one is not to be attained by smearing over a large canvas, nor the other by bestriding a vague topic."\(^2\) In the second place, serious literature and social philosophy share a common rhetorical aim. Both should seek to evoke sympathy and thus widen the boundaries of benevolence. In order to achieve this aim, both must focus primary attention on rendering the individual human being in as concrete a manner as possible.

If we are imbued with a deep sense of individual weal or woe, we shall be awe-struck at the idea of humanity in general. If we know little of it but its abstract and common properties, without their particular application, their force or degrees, we shall care just as little as we know either about the whole or the individuals.\(^3\)

Therefore, if either literature or social philosophy depart from what should be their central concern, their value as literature and social philosophy decreases. Bentham regarded individuals as "the flies of a summer;" Rousseau regarded

\(^1\)Works, XI, 23.  \(^2\)Ibid., XII, 55.  \(^3\)Ibid.
only himself. Ignoring essential experience of man and society, their treatments of human nature were not concrete, but logical or abstract. And the works of both were lacking in truth and effect. Modern poetry has a similar character. "The poets also have got into a way of scouting individuality as beneath the sublimity of their pretensions." Speaking of Lord Byron's works in particular, Hazlitt says:

The individual is not of sufficient importance to occupy his own thoughts or the thoughts of others. . . . The poet covers the face of nature with the beauty of his sentiments and the brilliancy of his paradoxes. . . . This all seems to proceed on a false estimate of individual nature and the value of human life.

Hazlitt's conception of the misuses of "reason" accounts at least in part for his explanation of the nature and value of the poetry written in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. For even though it did not belong there, "reason" invaded the province of poetry, and poetry became abstract, logical, discursive, and matter-of-fact.

Conclusion

Several things need to be said at the end of this chapter. For one, the foregoing definitions do not include every variation in meaning of "imagination," "fancy," "wit," and "reason" which appears in Hazlitt's works. The significant variations will be elaborated upon in the succeeding chapters.

1Works, XII, 53. 2Ibid.
These variations in use occur with all four faculties, although not with equal frequency. "Fancy" is the least stable term, as has already been noted, having shifting values and shifting connotations. The values Hazlitt apparently attaches to "reason" may change from positive to negative ones according to whether he associates "reason" on the one hand with intuition and common sense, or on the other hand with logic and abstraction. "Imagination" appears in contexts in which it takes on the more pejorative associations of "fancy." And a favorable, but traditional, meaning of "imagination" also appears. Hazlitt's conception of "wit" alone does not seem to waver.

The reason for this wavering in usage is that Hazlitt probably never made a sustained conscious attempt to systematically outline the philosophical basis of his critical pronouncements. However, with all the variations—with all the wavering in the use of terms, there appears in Hazlitt's writing an overall consistency of thought, based upon a fundamentally unchanging view of man's psychological make-up as it relates to aesthetic and to moral problems. These preliminary definitions of the faculties are essential, since they provide an accurate account of this view: From them we find Hazlitt to believe first, that man is moral and that sympathy is the greatest moral value; second, that man is creatively intellectual rather than deterministically sensual, and that he expresses his creative intellect in various ways,
some more bound to nature than others; and third, that man can perceive and respond to beauty. Hazlitt may shift the meanings of his descriptive terms, but his idea of the mind which they describe remains the same.
CHAPTER II

THE POETRY OF IMAGINATION

Hazlitt identifies the "four greatest names in English poetry"—Chaucer, Spenser, Shakespeare, and Milton—as the four major poets of the "imagination."¹ In the following passage, he both identifies these men as poets of the "imagination," and attempts to distinguish among them according to the psychological principle to which their "imaginations" were subservient.

As great poets, imagination, that is, the power of feigning things according to nature, was common to them all: but the principle or moving power, to which this faculty was most subservient in Chaucer, was habit, or inveterate prejudice; in Spenser, novelty, and the love of the marvellous; in Shakespeare, it was the force of passion, combined with every variety of possible circumstances; and in Milton, only with the highest.²

Because the concept of the "imagination" which I have summarized in the first chapter is primarily Hazlitt's concept of the faculty as it is subservient to strong passion, and because Hazlitt finds that the passionate "imagination" as a source of literary invention received its fullest expression in the dramatic tragedy of Shakespeare, I will begin my analysis of the "poetry of imagination" with a discussion of Shakespearean tragedy. The imaginative achievement of the

¹Works, V, 46. ²Ibid.
other three poets can best be estimated in reference to this standard, as can the relative merit of the poetic forms to which their genius gave expression: the Miltonic epic; the Chaucerian "historical" poetry; the Spenserian romance.

Shakespeare and Dramatic Tragedy

W. P. Albrecht, in his article, "Hazlitt's Preference for Tragedy," demonstrates that according to Hazlitt, the values attendant upon the "sympathetic imagination" can be realized most completely in literature by dramatic tragedy. These values were pointed out in the preceding chapter, where the "imagination" was discussed as the source of true perceptions, of moral behavior, and of poetry in general. Hazlitt prefers tragedy to other poetic forms, says Mr. Albrecht, because it is moral and true. The variable which makes the perceptions of the "imagination" more or less true is the degree of passion accompanying them: Strong passion enables the poet to go out of himself and share the feelings of others. Once he has shared these feelings, he is "supplied with the materials of universal truth." The greatest poets, therefore, habitually lose themselves in the feelings of others; it is only the lesser who think, and feel, and write about themselves. Since tragedy is the most impassioned species of poetry, it is also the truest.

Tragedy is moral because its effect is a moral one.

2Ibid., pp. 1042, 1045. 3Ibid., p. 1045. 4Ibid.
Because tragedy concerns itself with humanity in distress, tragedy is the most likely of all literary forms to cultivate a sentiment of benevolence in both writer and audience. We sympathise with what we know. Furthermore, "since unselfish concern for others becomes more acute through habit, both the writing and reading (or witnessing) of tragedy are moral experiences."¹ Human nature, once understood, cannot be despised.

Witnessing the evil which is a necessary ingredient in all tragedy, although pleasurable, is still moral. In the tragedies of Shakespeare, evil falls into its true perspective among the rich depths of the human soul.² The evil presented in tragedy has other moral effects: it excites a desire for the opposite good, and although it appeals to our love for strong excitement and satisfies the love of power, the appeal to sympathy acts to control these less desirable elements in our nature which have been aroused.³

In the light of Hazlitt's conception of reality, which includes his conception of man, we find that among the possible sources of a true knowledge of man and of reality, the "sympathetic imagination" stands supreme as the truest, and therefore the most poetically effective. That these are also the values realizable by dramatic tragedy, the above summary of Mr. Albrecht's argument shows.

Hazlitt's conception of tragedy and his ranking of it depend in great part upon his conception of the mind and art

¹Ibid.  ²Ibid.  ³Ibid.
of Shakespeare. At any rate, it is possible to define tragedy as Hazlitt might have defined it, drawing one's illustrative material almost exclusively from Hazlitt's comments on Shakespeare's works. And we find that the virtues of tragedy, of the "sympathetic imagination," and of Shakespeare, are one and the same.

In Hazlitt's conception of tragedy, "character" seems to be the "primary" element, for it is upon the truthful representation of character that the moral effect of tragedy primarily depends; that is, the arousing of audience sympathy. Certainly, Hazlitt finds Shakespeare's greatest excellence to be his ability to reveal the inmost reality of human nature. And Hazlitt has very definite ideas concerning in what the truth of tragic character consists.

As W. J. Bate points out in Prefaces to Criticism, a true representation of character, according to Hazlitt, is first of all concrete. Abstractions from the concrete such as are found in the types and classes of neo-classic tragedy are far inferior to the concretely realized individual personalities created by Shakespeare. "In reading this author, you do not merely learn what the characters say,—you see their persons." 2

Shakespeare's imagination borrowed from the life, and every circumstance, object, motive, passion, operated there as it would in reality, and produced a world of men and women as distinct, as true and as various as those that exist in nature. 3

1P. 132. 2Works, V, 48. 3Ibid., IV, pp. 293-94.
Human beings should ideally be represented as they actually exist in nature, where life is dynamic rather than static. Only a "sympathetic imagination" in a state of strong excitement can intuit the truth of the fluctuating and complicated impulses of human nature. Strong and passionate sympathy leads the "imagination" to comprehend the "fluid realities" of nature as "reason" never could.¹ Shakespeare possessed this aspect of imaginative power in the highest degree. It is only in Shakespeare's characters that we find "a continual composition and decomposition of ... elements, a fermentation of every particle."² Shakespeare's characters speak as they would speak in life, as though their lives were actually in the process of coming into being. "So the dialogues in Shakespeare are carried on ... without any appearance of preparation or premeditation."³

For the artist to achieve a perfect representation of life, the human personality must have been seen from within. Shakespeare of all poets was most capable of presenting the "internal view" because passion and imagination were perfectly united in him, enabling his mind to achieve a complete sympathetic identification with the minds of others. "The striking peculiarity of Shakespeare's mind was its generic quality, its power of communication with other minds."⁴ The communication is achieved by means of an almost magical

¹See Bate, Prefaces, p. 133. ²Works, V, 51.
³Ibid., p. 50. ⁴Works, V, 47.
projection. "Shakespeare had only to think of anything in order to become that thing, along with all the circumstances belonging to it.\(^1\)

The poet may be said, for the time, to identify himself with the character he wishes to represent, and to pass from one to another, like the same soul successively animating different bodies. . . . His plays alone are properly expressions of the passions, not descriptions of them.\(^2\)

Bate points out Hazlitt's interest in the intensity with which the truths of character are revealed. Conciseness in the presentation of character to the extent that much is suggested rather than stated is an extremely desirable quality, since a reader who must fill out nuances and relations himself has a more intense perception of truth than one who only passively hears explained a character's thoughts and feelings, and their interrelations.\(^3\) If a tragedy reveals truth of character by suggestion, it indicates that the poet himself was able, by means of the sympathetic and associative powers of the "imagination" to fuse the past actions, thoughts, and feelings of his characters with their thoughts and feelings of the present: A great poet condenses a vast amount of truth in one short sentence or phrase.

Shakespeare is the master in this art of character portrayal.

A word, an epithet, paints a whole scene, or throws us back whole years in the history of the person represented. So . . . when Prospero describes himself as left alone in the boat with his daughter, the epithet which he applies to her, 'Me and thy crying self, 'flings the imagination instantly back from

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\(^1\) *Works*, V, 48. \(^2\) *Ibid.*, p. 50. \(^3\) Bate, p. 134
the grown woman to the helpless condition of infancy.1

The tragedy which reveals the inmost depths of human character will fulfill the first moral effect of great drama, for the result is necessarily the sympathetic response of its audience. It follows as one of the "principles of human action" that "our sympathy is . . . excited in proportion to our knowledge of the pain, and of the disposition and feelings of the sufferer."2 The second effect, the regulation of evil in the human spirit, relates likewise to the truth to nature of the "sympathetic imagination." For the internal revelation of character affords not only a sort of clinical analysis of the individual human psyche, but also an insight into the essential nobility of man. The Shakespearean hero is always seen in the whole truth of his human dignity, so that evil falls into its true perspective among "the rich depths of the human soul."3 Shakespeare rarely creates even a villain whose evil is unalleviated by the presence of other human traits, for to the all-comprehending "sympathetic imagination," no one can appear totally depraved. Ignorance, not knowledge, would reveal such a picture of humanity.

Ignorance alone makes monsters or bugbears. . . . The thing is, that as a matter of hearsay or conjecture, we make abstractions of particular vices, and irritate ourselves against some particular quality or action of the person we dislike:—whereas, individuals are concrete existences, not arbitrary denominations or nicknames; and have

1Works, V, 48. 2Ibid., I, 23. 3Ibid., V, 6.
innumerable other qualities, good, bad, and indifferent, besides the damning feature with which we fill up the portrait or caricature, in our previous fancies. We can scarcely hate anyone that we know.¹

Hazlitt finds that Edmund in Lear, and Iago in Othello, are not thoroughly hateful personages: Edmund's villainy is "careless" and "lighthearted";² Iago is victimized by a sort of disinterested love of mischief.³ Of the Queen in Hamlet, Hazlitt says, "Shakespeare was thoroughly a master of the mixed motives of human character, and he here shews us the Queen, who was so criminal in some respects, not without sensibility and affection in other relations of life."⁴

Shakespeare is equally a master of external nature, for his images of natural objects have a high degree of truth. Imaginative imagery is true to nature in the same way that the imaginative expression of character is true. The descriptions of external nature are concrete, having an almost tangible quality. "The castle of Macbeth, round which 'the air smells wooingly,' and where 'the temple-haunting martlet builds,' has a real subsistence in the mind."⁵ Hazlitt points out the "exactness" of Shakespearean imagery, taking the following lines as his example:

'There is a willow growing o'er a brook,
That shews its hoary leaves i' th' glassy stream.'⁶

He points out that "hoary" is a perfect epithet, for "the

1Works, VIII, 262.  2Ibid., IV, 259.  3Ibid., p. 206  
⁴Ibid., p. 236.  ⁵Ibid., pp. 186-87  
⁶Ibid., 236n.; and V, 49-50.
inside of the leaves of the willow, next the water is on a whitish colour."\(^1\) Here, the "imagination" is "as true to nature as itself."\(^2\)

Shakespearean imagery is true to nature in that it is true to passion and emotion. "Shakespear's fancy lent words and images to the most refined sensibility to nature, struggling for expression: his descriptions are identical with the things themselves, seen through the fine medium of passion."\(^3\) The Shakespearean image therefore reveals the "life and motion" which poetry puts back into the universe, showing the "fluid realities of nature," indicating that "all things are connected and modify one another in nature."\(^4\)

The image may result from the passion of the poet himself, when the poet is more concerned to describe than to dramatize, as in

\begin{quote}
--Daffodils
That come before the swallow dares, and take
The winds of March with beauty; violets dim,
But sweeter than the lids of Juno's eyes
Or Cytherea's breath.--\(^5\)
\end{quote}

Or it may accord with the passion of the speaker, and become true dramatically:

When Iachimo says of Imogen,

\begin{quote}
'The flame o' th' taper
Bows toward her, and would under-peep her lids
To see the enclosed lights'--
\end{quote}

---passionate interpretation of the motion of the

\(^1\)Works, IV, 236n.; and V, 49-60. \(^2\)Ibid., V, 49.
\(^3\)Ibid., IV, 177. \(^4\)See Bate, Prefaces, pp. 133-134.
\(^5\)Ibid., IV, 176.
flame to accord with the speaker's own feelings, is true poetry.  

Similarly, "when Lear calls upon the heavens to avenge his cause 'for they are old like him,' there is nothing extravagant or impious in this sublime identification of his age with theirs; for there is no other image which could justice to the agonising sense of his wrongs and his despair."  

Hazlitt criticizes plot, character, and image in their role as tragic subjects, as they produce passion independently of their dramatic interest. For example, a tragic hero of a certain kind can produce a passionate response in an audience independent of the sympathy which a knowledge of his suffering affords. From the epic, "dramatic poetry borrows aid from the dignity of persons and things." Therefore, as subject, the tragic hero must be grand, surrounded by the trappings of splendour—since grandeur compels spontaneous admiration in all human beings, and since the common desire of all people is to identify themselves with the great and the powerful. In his comment on Coriolanus, Hazlitt says:  

A lion hunting a flock of sheep or a herd of wild asses is a more poetical object than they; and we even take part with the lordly beast, because our vanity or some other feeling makes us disposed to place ourselves in the situation of the strongest party. So we feel some concern for the poor citizens of Rome when they meet together to compare their wants and grievances, till Coriolanus comes in.  

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1Works, V, 4.  
2Ibid.  
3Ibid., p. 53.  
4Ibid., IV, 215.
And immediately the audience forgets about the mob, and centers all its attention upon the haughty hero. Coriolanus' grandeur appeals to the "imagination," a naturally "aristocratical" faculty.¹

But Hazlitt does not make a simple equation between grandeur and superiority in power. One might make use of Hazlitt's praise of Michael Angelo's figures to illuminate his conception of the ideal tragic hero: "Michael Angelo's forms everywhere obtrude the sense of power upon the eye. His limbs convey an ideal of muscular strength, of moral grandeur, and even of intellectual dignity."² Therefore, some tyrants, though naturally "interesting" must be considered inferior as tragic subjects. There are few characters on the stage that excite more "disgust and loathing" than Shakespeare's King John. "He has no intellectual grandeur or strength of character to shield him from the indignation which his immediate conduct provokes."³ Of Richard III and Macbeth in their last extremity, Hazlitt says: One finally loses one's sympathy for Richard: "we can only regard him as a wild beast taken in the toils: while we never entirely lose our concern for Macbeth; and he calls back all our concern with that fine close of thoughtful melancholy."⁴ In the total effect of the presentation of the two characters we find that Richard "has no mixture of common humanity," while

¹Works, IV, 214.  
²Ibid., p. 78.  
³Ibid., pp. 306-7.  
⁴Ibid., p. 193
"Macbeth is full of 'the milk of human kindness,' is frank, sociable, generous."¹ (These virtues may seem a little too homely to constitute "moral grandeur" and yet they are still signs of that which is a high rather than a low principle of human behavior.)

There is a total effect of the "subject" which comprehends both character and event. "The power of imagination, in works of invention, must be in proportion to the force of the natural impressions, which are the subject of them."²

In tragedy, these "natural impressions" are the hateful persecutions of the good by the evil. A proper balance of feeling regarding both the evil in human nature and the evil acts performed and suffered must be preserved in the audience's mind, but this requires a great tact, skill, and of course, imaginative power. Hazlitt refuses to believe that Shakespeare's genius may have occasionally failed him in this respect, and he therefore will not accept Shakespeare as the author of Titus Andronicus.

Titus Andronicus is certainly as unlike Shakespeare's usual style as it is possible. It is an accumulation of vulgar physical horrors, in which the power exercised by the poet bears no proportion to the repugnance exercised by the subject.³

On the other hand, Shakespeare does maintain the proper balance in Antony and Cleopatra.

It is worth while to observe that Shakespeare has contrasted the extreme magnificence of the descriptions in his play with pictures of extreme suffering and physical horror . . . partly perhaps to

¹Works, IV, 192. ²Ibid., p. 271. ³Ibid., p. 357.
place the effeminate character of Mark Antony in a more favorable light.¹

Particularly in his criticism of what he considers to be decadent tragedy, Hazlitt always objects to that which cloys the sense with either delights or horrors. Even Marlowe can be criticized on this point. In The Lascivious Queen "the continual repetition of plain practical villainy and undigested horrors disgusts the sense, and blunts the interest."²

Hazlitt's concern with the poet's handling of the tragic "subject" seems to indicate that the truly superlative imaginative poet must always go beyond what is signified by a "concrete" representation of nature, and convey the less tangible values inherent in man's experience of nature, thus appealing to more in the mind than those faculties which register, retain, and recombine sense experience. On the whole, imaginative power of Shakespeare is equal to his tragic subjects so that

the tragedy of Shakespeare, which is true poetry, stirs our inmost affections; abstracts evil from itself by combining it with all the forms of the imagination, and with the deepest workings of the heart, and rouses the whole man within us.³

**Milton and the Epic**

In his brief characterization of the "four greatest names in English poetry" Hazlitt lists Milton along with Shakespeare as a poet whose "imagination" was subservient

¹*Works*, IV, 230

²*Ibid.*, VI, 207. Hazlitt refers here to a play now considered to be partially by Dekker, and partially by other unidentified authors.

to the ruling power of passion. This combination of "imagination" and passion in Shakespeare produced an almost supernatural ability in the poet to project himself into the minds of others. Milton, great genius though he was, remained on a more human level; and therefore, though a poet of the "imagination," was neither "cameleon-like" nor a Proteus of the human intellect" as Shakespeare was.

Milton has by allusion embodied a great part of his political and personal history in the chief characters and incidents of Paradise Lost. He has, no doubt, wonderfully adapted and heightened them, but the elements are the same.¹

Because of his intensely sympathetic "imagination," Shakespeare's genius gave definition to the highest literary form, tragedy—a form which requires an almost perfect knowledge of all human passion. Milton's genius, on the other hand, gave definition to the epic, a form which depends for its effect, not so much upon perfect knowledge of human beings, as upon a conception of nature which is above all grand and powerful.

Hazlitt says that in their perfection "dramatic poetry and epic, . . . approximate to and strengthen one another."² Each borrows from the primary element of the other. Epic poetry borrows human passion from dramatic poetry; and as has been shown previously, dramatic borrows aid "from the dignity of persons and things"—from the grandeur of subject, which seems to me to be the primary element

¹Works, VIII, 42. ²Ibid., V, 52-53.
of the epic. Plot, character, and image together form the epic subject, having little significance in themselves, except as the poet uses them in combination in order to produce epic effects.

The subject (or object)\(^1\) of a dramatic poem is necessarily an individual human being, and ideally an individual seen at close hand. It is distance, "ignorance alone makes monsters or bugbears."\(^2\) Sympathy depends upon intimate knowledge.

The objects of dramatic poetry affect us by sympathy, by their nearness to ourselves, as they take us by surprise, or force us upon action, 'while rage with rage doth sympathize'; the objects of epic poetry affect us through the medium of . . . magnitude and distance, by their permanence and universality. The one fill us with terror and pity, the other with admiration and delight.\(^3\)

Thus Hazlitt makes one direct contrast: the epic object does not demand sympathetic knowledge, but achieves its effect on the "imagination" equally well through distance. The reason for this is that the epic object is not necessarily human. One's interest is riveted, not by a concern for a man in a certain situation, but by something intrinsic

\(^1\)Hazlitt uses these important words synonymously. Although they are basic tools of his critical terminology he never overtly defines them. The definition which corresponds with Hazlitt's usage is, "something which on being seen excites a particular emotion, as admiration, horror, disdain, pity, amusement." (N. E. D.) Hazlitt substitutes one word for the other only for reasons of euphony—apparently to avoid unpleasant repetition.

\(^2\)Works, VIII, 262.

\(^3\)Ibid., V, 52.
There are certain objects that strike the imagination, and inspire awe in the very idea of them, independently of any dramatic interest, that is, of any connection with the vicissitudes of human life. For instance, we cannot think of the pyramids of Egypt, of a Gothic ruin, or an old Roman encampment, without a certain emotion, a sense of power and sublimity coming over the mind.

External qualities of certain objects inspire awe: an epic is composed of images of objects with such qualities: "A poem might be constructed almost entirely of such images, of the highest intellectual passion, with little dramatic interest; and it is in this way that Milton has in great measure constructed his poem." And hence, we find that the significance of Adam and Eve in Paradise Lost does not come primarily from the interest the reader has in them as personalities who suffer or who are happy, but from the response of the reader to them as figures, whose very external attributes affect the "imagination" and produce passion.

The want of passion has been brought as an objection against Milton, and his Adam and Eve have been considered as rather insipid personages. We do not feel this objection ourselves: we are content to be spectators in such scenes, without any other excitement. In general, the interest in Milton is essentially epic, and not dramatic; and the difference between the epic and the dramatic is this, that in the former the imagination produces the passion, and in the latter the passion produces the imagination. The interest of epic poetry arises from the contemplation of certain objects in themselves grand and

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1The production of the epic effect presupposes a certain amount of sympathetic identification with human passion on the part of the author, who must know what affects a general audience as grand, awe inspiring etc.

2Works, V, 52. 3Ibid., IV, 110.
beautiful: the interest of dramatic poetry from sympathy with the passions and pursuits of others.¹

"Grandeur" is the term which Hazlitt uses most frequently to describe the images and subjects of *Paradise Lost*, although he uses words which convey similar meanings such as "magnitude," "vastness," etc.²

In all this, there are echoes of neo-Longinian terminology and also of neo-Longinian ideas, I think. The concept of the impressive "grand" object capable of producing a passionate response recalls traditional eighteenth century theory, as does Hazlitt's conception of the nature of the response.³ The epic, or epic subject, instead of evoking sympathy, produces a more indefinable sort of "passion," albeit a passion directed toward objects outside the self. Hazlitt also characterizes the response by the terms, "admiration," "a certain emotion," "a sense of power and sublimity," "awe."⁴

As a result of his conception of the proper epic effect, Hazlitt's treatment of the epic character differs from his treatment of the tragic character. The epic character must have a certain vividness of the painter rather than the intellectual distinctness of the poet. Milton's Eve differs from Shakespeare's heroines because she is visually presented.⁵ Shakespeare's heroines, on the other hand, are

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¹ *Works*, IV, 110. ² *Ibid.*, V, 64

³ See Wimsatt and Brooks' discussion of the "sublime" and natural objects in their *Short History*, pp. 286-87.

"pure abstractions of the affections."¹ Satan is an ideal epic figure,² "the most heroic subject that ever was chosen for a poem."³ His external attributes make him suitable in the first place: "The Achilles of Homer is not more distinct; the Titans were not more vast."⁴ Satan's "vastness" extends to his mental and moral qualities--to his passions. These passions obviously affect the mind more through their grandeur than through any precision with which the mind knows them:

His aim was no less than the throne of the universe; his means, myriads of angelic armies bright. . . .

His ambition was the greatest, and his punishment was the greatest, but not so his despair, for his fortitude was as great as his sufferings. . . . He was the greatest power that was ever overthrown, with the strongest will left . . . to endure.⁵

With all this, he does not excite sympathy, but simply admiration. As a matter of fact, Hazlitt considers him a "most heroic subject" but his concept of "heroic" does not necessarily include "goodness." Satan is clearly the villain of the piece.

Milton, like Shakespeare, shows the loftiness of his genius, and the depth of his insight into the nature of things, by not presenting his villain as grotesque and totally depraved. Evidently, the great imaginative poet's presentation of evil is always tempered by the simultaneous presence of the ideal.

¹Works, IV, 105. ²Ibid., V, 62. ³Ibid., p. 63 ⁴Ibid., p. 64. ⁵Ibid., p. 63.
Milton has got rid of the horns and tail, the vulgar and physical insignia of the devil, and clothed him with other greater and intellectual terrors, reconciling beauty and sublimity, and converting the grotesque and deformed into the ideal and classical. Certainly Milton's mind rose superior to all others... in not confounding the depravity of the will with physical distortion, or supposing that the distinctions of good and evil were only to be subjected to the gross ordeal of the senses.1

Milton's Satan is far superior to the Satan drawn in Crashaw's translation of Marino's Sospetto d'Herode.

Milton's portrait is true beauty and true sublimity: it is also true pathos and morality: for it interests the mind, and affects it powerfully with the idea of glory tarnished, and happiness forfeited with loss of virtue: but from the horns and tail of the brute-demon, imagination cannot reascend to the Son of the morning, nor be dejected by the transition from weal to woe, which it cannot, without a violent effort, picture to itself.2

Hazlitt's major concern with Adam and Eve seems to be to defend them as suitable subjects for epic poetry. If they are not comparable figures to Achilles or the Titans, Milton's "imagination" lends them the necessary pictorial sublimity: "The persons of Adam and Eve... are always accompanied, in our imagination, with the grandeur of the naked figure; they convey to us the ideas of sculpture."3

If unlike Satan, Adam and Eve had no great ambitions, no magnificent armies, no power, still the consequences of "their first false step" were of such vast importance to the human race, that their single action, though a simple one by Homeric standards is magnified many times by its results.4

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1Works, VI, 316. 2Ibid., p. 317.
3Ibid., V, 60. 4Ibid., p. 67.
In like manner, since everyone who witnesses the idyllic peace of the Garden of Eden is aware of the storms and tumult to come, even the tranquility of Adam and Eve cannot be considered ordinary tranquility with its ordinary effect.\(^1\)

Epic and dramatic poetry can not be distinguished from one another in the matter of imagery, although there is perhaps a difference in emphasis in the kind of imaginative imagery employed by Milton. One of the qualities of the "imagination" especially prominent in Milton's poetry is that it aggrandizes rather than diminishes objects of sense perception. Thus, Milton surrounds his images with "every possible association of beauty or grandeur, whether moral, intellectual, or physical."\(^2\) His style (as opposed to the metaphysical) is remarkable for "breadth and massiness, or what Dr. Johnson calls 'aggregation of ideas.'"\(^3\) Hazlitt explains Milton's use of classical mythology as a thoroughly legitimate and natural means of heightening nature according to the intuitions of the "imagination:" the classical mythology naturally imposes on the "imagination" "by all the attractions of beauty and grandeur."\(^4\)

Milton's imagery manifests several other typical powers of the "imagination," One is the power of rendering images concretely. "There is also the same depth of impression in his descriptions of the objects of all the different

\(^1\)Works, V, 67. \(^2\)Ibid., p. 58.
\(^3\)Ibid., VI, 55. \(^4\)Ibid., IV, 34.
senses, whether colours, or sounds, or smells—the same absorption of his mind in whatever engaged his attention at the time."¹ Associative coalescence, the ability to fuse a multiplicity of impressions into one, is a more frequently mentioned quality. Milton's learning "has the effect of intuition,"² and therefore does not appear to be a mere artificial adornment. Again, "Milton had as much of what is meant by gusto as any poet. He forms the most intense conceptions of things, and then embodies them with a single stroke of his pen."³ Finally, of all the poets of the "imagination" Milton is the only one in whose work Hazlitt points out what might be called synaesthetic effects.

A sound arises 'like a steam of rich distilled perfumes'; we hear the pealing organ, but the incense on the altars is also there, and the statues of the gods are ranged around! The ear indeed predominates over the eye because it is more immediately affected.⁴ Milton's imagery seems to be more static than dynamic—it does not have the fluid quality which Shakespeare's does. Hazlitt finds the Miltonic imagery to be concrete, but he does not emphasize its naturalistic truthfulness as he does that of Shakespeare.

Although Milton and Shakespeare are both poets of the "imagination" their poetry is different in kind and in value. For great as it is, the Miltonic epic is inferior to Shakespearean tragedy. The reason lies in a combination of the nature of the epic and in the limitation of Milton's

¹Works, V, 59. ²Ibid., pp. 58-59. ³Ibid., IV, 38. ⁴Ibid., V, 60.
"imagination," at least in comparison with Shakespeare's. The basic inferiority of the epic is that character and passion are second in importance to the epic "subject." As a result, the effect of the epic is inferior to the effect of tragedy: for tragedy produces compassion, the enlarging of sympathy of man for man; while the epic, although it carries an audience beyond self-interest, produces the less definable awe and wonder. Then Milton's "imagination" would seem to be less objective\(^1\) than Shakespeare's, and therefore less "true." At any rate, the truth to nature of imaginative insight is far more important in tragedy than in the epic, for in tragedy, a Shakespearean "imagination" can reveal the internal reality of human nature—a truth which results from projection, sympathetic identification: while the epic "imagination" is more limited, merely revealing external nature in its heightened, imaginatively perceived form. The epic has a universal psychological truth only to the extent that the poet could select images that are universally awe-inspiring.

(This difference in the relative truth of the "imagination" of the two poets brings out one of the difficulties

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\(^1\) Hazlitt does not use the words "objective and subjective." Still, the modern conception of artistic objectivity is anticipated in his emphasis on the value of art based in concrete nature—and in his objections to art which seems to originate in the mind only without anything real to correspond to it; to literary subject matter originating in the individuality of the author; and to tendencies to lay stress on private feeling and opinion. The conflict Hazlitt defines between vanity and sympathy might be said to correspond to subjective and objective, as contrasting approaches to literary subject matter.
in Hazlitt's thinking. When the "imagination" perceives things through identification which cannot be revealed to the eye, but only to the mind, particularly such phenomena as the passions, Hazlitt seems to believe in their reality in a very naturalistic sense. Here the "imagination" attains its highest degree of objectivity. However, when the "imagination" heightens and aggrandizes, endowing external nature with life and motion, but without reference to identification, the faculty seems to be more subjective than objective, the truth it discloses being only poetically or psychologically true.)

Chaucer and Historical Poetry

Chaucer is a less "poetical" poet in Hazlitt's sense than either Milton or Shakespeare, mainly because his "imagination" is not subservient to passion. Hazlitt characterizes Chaucer's poetical temperament as stern and masculine.2 The poet does not indulge the effusions of his "fancy,"3 but instead "delights in severe activity of mind."4 In Hazlitt's

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1W. P. Albrecht minimizes the importance of the naturalistic depiction of nature in Hazlitt's conception of poetic truth, and focuses upon the importance of the poet's capturing, by means of imaginative sympathy the essential qualities of man's experience of nature. "The truth of poetry depends, therefore, not on fidelity to fact, but on essential qualities of human experience revealed to the poet through sympathetic identification and conveyed by generally interesting events and value-charged images, selected and fused in a state of feeling." ("Hazlitt on the Poetry of Wit," PMLA, LXXV, June, 19607, 245-46.) Or great poetry is based on "common experience, known and communicated by the power of sympathetic imagination." (Ibid., p. 249.) Mr. Albrecht's emphasis on this point helps to eliminate the problem of inconsistency.

2Works, V, 20. 3Ibid., p. 22. 4Ibid., p. 20.
opinion, Chaucer seems to be a kind of scientist among poets. "Chaucer ... numbered the classes of men, as Linnaeus numbered the plants."¹ Chaucer's is a calm and dispassionate poetry, whose details come from careful and meticulous observation.

The poetry inspired by Chaucer's down-to-earth "imagination" is most frequently referred to by Hazlitt as "historical" poetry. As opposed to Shakespeare's "dramatic" and Milton's "epic," Chaucer's characters are labelled "historical" or "narrative."² Hazlitt describes Chaucer's poetry "in general" as historical.

It was observed in the last Lecture that painting describes what the object is in itself, poetry what it implies or suggests. Chaucer's poetry is not, in general, the best confirmation of the truth of this distinction, for his poetry is more picturesque and historical than almost any other.³ (Italics mine.)

In another passage, Hazlitt says, "Chaucer's poetry reads like history."⁴ Hazlitt does not attempt to define a "historical" poem as he does the epic or dramatic, although Hazlitt's opposition of the historical painter to the portrait painter suggests what he might have said. The passage is relevant in Hazlitt's mind to Chaucer's work, for he uses "the admirable descriptions of the kings of Thrace and Inde" in the Knight's Tale as an illustration of "history painting."⁵

History-painting is imaginary portrait-painting. The portrait-painter gives you an individual, such as he is in himself, and vouches for the truth of the likeness as a matter of fact: the historical painter gives

¹Works, V, 24. ²Ibid., p. 51
³Ibid., p. 33. ⁴Ibid., p. 20. ⁵Ibid., XVIII, 80.
you the individual such as he is likely to be,—that is, approaches as near to the reality as his imagination will enable him to do, leaving out such particulars as are inconsistent with the preconceived idea,—as are merely trifling and accidental,—and retaining all such as are striking, probable, and consistent.¹

The historical poet, like the historical painter, would seem to be one who "paints" as if he were reconstructing an historical fact to the best of his ability, approaching as near to the reality as his "imagination" will enable him to do. The "imagination" in such an operation, half creates the fact, half reproduces it in an exact correspondence with nature; but here the "imagination" does not heighten the fact or penetrate it, as a passionate "imagination" would. Chaucer's poetry is a perfect record of nature as it is ordinarily perceived.

This does not mean that Chaucer's own perceptions were ordinary but, instead, that he had a perfect comprehension of nature as all men observe it. Instead of being subservient to "passion" Chaucer's mind was subservient to the everyday observations of other men. Therefore, when Hazlitt says that Chaucer's mind was subservient to "habit or inveterate prejudice,"² he refers to the prejudices of others rather than to the prejudices of the poet, I think. For example, Chaucer's "sentiment" is founded "on the habitual prejudices and passions of the very characters he introduces."³ Hazlitt seems to be expressing the same idea when

¹Works, XVIII, 78. ²Works, V, 46. ³Ibid., XVI, 54.
he says, "we see Chaucer's characters as they saw them-
selves, not as they appeared to others or might have appear-
ed to the poet."¹ Likewise, Chaucer "describes inanimate
objects from the effect they have on the mind of the obser-
ver."²

That Chaucer's view of things comes from the stand-
point of the ordinary observer accounts for one contrast
between his poetry and Shakespeare's. For Shakespeare gave
free reign to his "imagination" and reveals the "nature"
seen by the poet.

Chaucer attended chiefly to the real and the
natural, that is, to the involuntary and inevitable
impressions on the mind in given circumstances; Shake-
speare exhibited also the possible and the fantastical,
--not only what things are in themselves, but whatever
they might seem to be, . . . ∫ in ∏ their endless combi-
nations.³

Therefore, we do not have the subtle nuances, the fusion of
impressions, the uniting of opposite extremes, the suggestive
power typical of Shakespearean poetry present in the Chaucer-
ian character or image. "There is no double entendre in the
characters of Chaucer: they are either quite serious or quite
comic."⁴ Since we always see Chaucer's characters from the

¹Works, IV, 225. ²Ibid., XVI, 54. ³Ibid., IV, 226.

⁴Ibid., p. 225. It is strange in the light of Haz-
litt's interest in the comic that he should dismiss the comic
element in Chaucer almost without comment. There is merely
a sentence or so devoted to the Wife of Bath, the Cock and
the Fox, and January and May. (Works, V, 32-33.) One pos-
sible explanation may be that, in Hazlitt's opinion, society
must have reached a stage of artificiality and affected man-
ners before any true subject matter for comedy can exist;
and in Hazlitt's view of English history, Chaucer did not
live in such an age. Even the Elizabethan Age contrasts in
its rudeness and simplicity, its barbaric naturalness, with
outside, they cannot have the complex individuality which Shakespeare's characters do.

Chaucer's characters are sufficiently distinct from one another, but they are too little varied in themselves, too much like identical propositions. They are consistent, but uniform; we get no new idea of them from first to last; they are not placed in different lights, nor are their subordinate traits brought out in new situations; they are like portraits or physiognomical studies, with the distinguishing features marked with inconceivable truth and precision.¹

Likewise Chaucer's imagery may be precise, but it is not poetic. Everything in Chaucer has a downright reality. "A simile or sentiment is as if it were given in upon evidence."²

Not all the characteristics of Chaucer's poetry derive from the poet's submission of his own mind to the minds of others. Only a poet possesses the ability to translate impressions into expression. The chief virtues of Chaucer's brand of literary expression are vividness and distinctness. "His interest in what he saw gave new distinctness and force to his power of observation."³ Chaucer's descriptions have a perfect accuracy which also lends them force; they present "distinct images" to the mind, and this distinctness is not only visual, but evidently tactile as well. The following passages illustrate Hazlitt's admiration for Chaucer's vividness, which the critic apparently finds to be the greatest excellence of the poet.

the civilized artificiality of the Restoration, the Golden Age of English comedy. (Works, VI, 36-37.) Hazlitt may have considered Chaucer's comedy simply insignificant.

¹Ibid., V, 50-51. ²Ibid., IV, 226. ³Ibid., V, 22.
He speaks of what he wishes to describe with the accuracy, the discrimination of one who relates what has happened to himself, or has had the best information from those who have been eye witnesses of it. The strokes of his pencil always tell.

Are the admirable descriptions of the kings of Thrace and Inde in Chaucer's Knight's Tale, less poetical, or historical, or ideal, because they are distinguished by traits as characteristic as they are striking;—in their lineaments, their persons, their armour. . . . The four white bulls, and the lions which accompany them are equally fine, but they are not fine because they present no distinct image to the mind.

Chaucer described external objects with the eye of a painter, or he might be said to have embodied them with the hand of a sculptor, every part is so thoroughly made out, and tangible.

Chaucer's descriptions of natural scenery possess the same sort of characteristic excellence, or what might be termed gusto. They have a local truth and freshness, which gives the very feeling of the air, the coolness or moisture of the ground.

Hazlitt finds "occasional sublimity" in Chaucer, particularly in the Knight's Tale, which is a favorite with him. Here nature appears heightened by the "imagination," and affecting objects are represented which naturally arouse emotion in the spectator. In the tale are descriptions characterized by "terrible beauty," conveying a "sense of abstract power." A "pleasing awe" is felt by the observer. The death of Arcite has a powerful effect because "it comes after triumph and victory, after the pomp of sacrifice, the solemnities of prayer, the celebration of the gorgeous

1Works, V, 21. 2Ibid., XVIII, 80.
3Ibid., IV, 226. 4Ibid., V, 26-27.
5Ibid., V, 26. 6Ibid. 7Ibid.
rites of chivalry."¹ Hazlitt mentions the "beauty and grandeur" of the descriptions of the three temples of Mars, of Venus, and Diana, and the ornaments and ceremonies used in each.² But in Hazlitt's opinion, all this is obviously not typical Chaucer.

As a poet of "imagination," Chaucer has his share of the qualities typical of Shakespeare and Milton. His sympathy with things outside himself is vast; only a perfect comprehension of human nature could reproduce with such precision the universal impression which the external world of everyday has upon all men. (Chaucer's ability to comprehend this universal impression is exactly the ability which a subjective poet, like Wordsworth, does not have. Wordsworth expresses merely the particular impressions which the external world has upon himself. The result, in Hazlitt's opinion, was distortion of things as they are.) However, in Chaucer's case, as opposed particularly to Shakespeare's sympathy ends in the poet, for the poetry itself does not lead to the cultivation of strong sympathy in others. In one place, Hazlitt ascribes this failure to Chaucer's lack of invention. "He wanted the resources of invention to lay open the stores of nature or the human heart with the same radiant light that Shakespeare has done." And Hazlitt implies that the poet's sympathy is severely disciplined, bound to express only the habitual feelings of its subjects.

¹ Works, V, 30. ² Ibid. ³ Ibid., IV, 226.
Similarly, the power and passion of the universe, as it is conveyed by Milton's epic sublimity, appears in Chaucer, but muted, at least most of the time. There remains Chaucer's objective truthfulness--his concrete rendering of the realities of everyday. But this concreteness remains external; there are no penetrations into the fluid realities of an inner core.

**Spenser and Romance**

Farther from Shakespeare than any of the major poets of the "imagination" is Spenser. His poetry, deriving from an "imagination" subservient to a "love of the Marvelous"\(^1\) seems to carry the reader away from rather than toward nature, obscuring its face rather than illuminating it. Spenser's mind was alienated from the "'close pent-up' scenes of ordinary life;"\(^2\) the poet himself was not an "ordinary mortal" but a "creature of the element that lived in the rainbow and played in the plighted clouds."\(^3\)

In Spenser, we wander in another world, among ideal beings. . . . He paints nature, not as we find it, but as we expected to find it. . . . He waves his wand of enchantment . . . and throws a delicious veil over all actual objects.\(^4\)

In this was, Spenser is the "poet of romance."\(^5\) The world, in his writings, appears as it would in "a splendid voluptuous dream."\(^6\) Thus, Spenser is "a painter of abstractions,"

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\(^1\)Works, V, 46. \(^2\)Ibid., 20.
\(^3\)Ibid., XVII, 127. \(^4\)Ibid., V, 35.
\(^5\)Ibid. \(^6\)Ibid., IX, 236.
which he describes "with a dazzling minuteness." ¹

Hazlitt values Spenser's productions above all for their beauty. "The love of beauty . . . and not of truth, is the moving principle of his mind." ² And Spenserian "beauty" seems to have a far lesser power than Miltonic "sublimity," for it does not result in "awe," but in "delight," "enchantment," and "pleasure." ³ The description of the allegorical personages in the Faerie Queen is "gorgeous and delightful." ⁴ Hazlitt particularly emphasizes Spenser's pictorial vividness: Spenser is "a poet to whom justice will never be done till a painter of equal genius arises to embody the dazzling and enchanting creations of his pen." ⁵ Spenser's poetry also captivates the ear: Spenser's stanza "has not the bold dramatic transitions of Shakespeare's blank verse, nor the high raised tone of Milton's; but it is the perfection of melting harmony, dissolving the soul in pleasure." ⁶

There is nothing of note in Hazlitt's criticism of Spenser to indicate that his appreciation of the poet goes any deeper than this feeling for the exquisite beauty of his lines. Hazlitt does not know a "sage and serious Spenser" although he says once: "[Milton] is altogether a serious poet; and in this differs from Chaucer and Shakespeare, and resembles Spenser." ⁷ Hazlitt only means, however, that neither Spenser nor Milton had any real talent for the comic. ⁸

¹Ibid., V, 35. ²Ibid., p. 35. ³Ibid., pp. 35, 44. ⁴Ibid., IX, 236. ⁵Ibid., XX, 240. ⁶Works, V, 44. ⁷Ibid., IX, 237. ⁸Ibid., pp. 236-237.
As a matter of fact, in Hazlitt's view, Spenser lacks the lofty moral stature of Milton and Shakespeare. Hazlitt is obviously offended by what he finds to be Spenser's delight in "luxurious enjoyment" and his "unrestrained indulgence of flowery tenderness." Spenser is charged with being "lascivious and sensual."

Spenser... is very apt to pry into mysteries which do not belong to the Muses. Milton's voluptuousness is not lascivious or sensual. He describes beautiful objects for their own sakes. Spenser has an eye to the consequences, and steeps everything in pleasure, often not of the purest kind.

There are several things in the discussion of Spenser which anticipate Hazlitt's criticism of the "poetry of fancy." It will be seen later that the poets in whose minds "fancy" reigns supreme have effeminate temperaments (a fault of Spenser's) and indulge both themselves and their audiences, having little purpose or effect other than the delight of the senses. Great imaginative poetry, in contrast, always appeals to the mind, the heart, the will—the whole man.

But no poet of "fancy" receives the high, unequivocal praise which Spenser does. Clearly, Spenser belongs with the poets of "imagination," the great poets of nature. The truth to nature of Spenser's feeling for the beautiful is nowhere challenged, and his "abstract" fairy tale world provokes a universally sympathetic response. Finally,

1Works, XVI, 54. 2Ibid., V, 20. 3Ibid., IV, 110. 4Ibid. 5Ibid., V, 20.
Spenserian "beauty" on occasion partakes of the sublime, although the Spenserian effect is termed "pathos" and "elevation of sentiment."

Spenser has been unjustly charged with a want of passion and of strength. He has both in an immense degree. He has not indeed the pathos of immediate action or suffering, which is more properly the dramatic; but he has all the pathos of sentiment and romance—all that belongs to distant objects of terror, and uncertain, imaginary distress. His strength... is not strength of will or action, of bone and muscle, nor is it coarse and palpable—but it assumes a character of vastness and sublimity seen through the same visionary medium, and blended with appalling associations of preternatural agency.¹

The Literature of the Age of Elizabeth

Since Hazlitt designates the Age of Elizabeth as the period when English literature in general was the most "imaginative," a discussion of Hazlitt's criticism of the period is necessary. The introductory chapter to the Lectures on the Dramatic Literature of the Age of Elizabeth is devoted in great part to explaining why the environment of Elizabethan England encouraged the writing of imaginative literature as no other environment has done, before or since. In this chapter Hazlitt expresses one of his favorite ideas: that in the Elizabethan Age neither the progress of science nor of civilization, nor of democracy, had yet taken away the glamour from human life, had yet "taken the colours out of the rainbow." During that time, the world appeared to everyone as a colorful, dangerous and awe-inspiring pageant

¹Ibid., p. 42.
which automatically stimulated "imagination" and passion.¹

To begin with, Elizabethan society was still sufficiently untamed and barbaric for "danger" to be a significant element in everyday life. At least the world was not being over-regulated by street lights and the police, and there was plenty of room for "midnight secret murders."²

Man's life was . . . more full of traps and pitfalls; of hair-breath accidents by floor and field; more waylaid by sudden and startling evils; it trod on the brink of hope and fear; stumbled upon fate unawares; while the imagination, close behind it, caught at . . . the shape of danger, or snatched a wild and fearful joy from its escape.³ (Italics mine.)

In addition, although the age of modern warfare was beginning, memories of nobler battlefields survived. "'The age of chivalry was not then quite gone.'"⁴ As a result, "the clashing of armour struck on the imagination of the ardent and young."⁵ Finally, the progress toward democracy had not begun its levelling of social distinctions, robbing classes and professions of their distinctive external garb. "The surface of society was embossed with hieroglyphics."⁶

The distinctions of dress, the badges of different professions, the very signs of the shops, which we have set aside for written inscriptions over the doors, were . . . a sort of visible language to the imagination.⁷ (Italics mine.)

The great influx upon the Elizabethan world of things newly discovered, whether new books or new worlds, stimulated the

¹Works, VI, 175-92. ²Ibid., p. 188
³Ibid., p. 189. ⁴Ibid., p. 189. ⁵Ibid.
⁶Ibid., p. 191. ⁷Ibid., p. 190.
whole mind. Hazlitt notes the importance of the translations of the Greek and Roman classics and of the Bible.

The New World too has its impact:

What also gave an unusual impetus to the mind of man at this period, was the discovery of the New World, and the reading of voyages and travels. Green Islands and golden sands seemed to arise, as by enchantment, out of . . . the watery waste, and invite the cupidity, or wing the imagination of the dreaming speculator. (Italics mine.)

The translation of the Bible made every man a virtuoso in relation at this time, and the spirit of the Reformation helped make the Christian religion a vital part of the atmosphere of the age. That Christianity should become a matter of intense concern to a whole populace is important, for thus the Christian religion could influence the general "imagination." The religion of Christ was "the religion of the heart," and encouraged in all its adherents a selfless sympathy with others.

[Christ] was the first true teacher of morality; for he alone conceived the idea of a pure humanity. He redeemed man from the worship of that idol, self. . . . He taught the love of good for the sake of good, without regard to personal or sinister views, and made the affections of the heart the sole seat of morality, sternness of the will.

In turning to the imaginative literature of the Age of Elizabeth, we come to Shakespeare's fellow tragedians. These men were literary giants to be sure, but none produced the tragedy of the "imagination" in the same fullness which

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1Works, VI, 187. 2Ibid., p. 182.
3Ibid., pp. 182-84. 4Ibid., p. 184. 5Ibid.
Shakespeare did. The qualities of imaginative genius are apt to appear in parts of plays rather than the whole. Marlowe, Dekker, and Webster are the dramatists of the period whom Hazlitt treats most fully as poets of "imagination."

Marlowe's name "stands high," "almost first in this list of dramatic worthies."¹ His "imagination" is a passionate one. "There is a lust of power in his writings, a hunger and thirst after uprightness, a glow of the imagination, unhallowed by anything but its own energies. His thoughts burn within him like a furnace with bickering flames."² The products of Marlowe's "imagination" can be compared with the works of Milton more easily than with those of Shakespeare. The subject of Faust has a "lofty imaginative nature."³ The character of the hero has the same sort of epic sublimity which the character of Satan does. The sketch of the character is "rude" but "gigantic;"⁴ its outlines "grand" and "daring;" its execution "abrupt and fearful."⁵ Even the thoughts in this play are "vast and irregular": "The style halts and staggers under them."⁶

An "intense passion" inspires The Lascivious Queen, but there is insufficient imaginative power in this play:

The continual repetition of plain practical villainy and undigested horrors disgusts the sense, and blunts the interest. The mind is hardened into obduracy, not melted into sympathy, by such barefaced and

The tragedy has failed to achieve what it should have; the "imagination" has not proved to be "in proportion to the natural impressions which are its subject." Hazlitt's criticism of Richard II is interesting, because he compares it with Shakespeare's Edward II. The death of Edward is superior to that of Shakespeare's king: The "heart-breaking distress, and the sense of human weakness, . . . is not surpassed by any writer." The rest of the play is inferior, however. There is "little dramatic effect," and the characters seem to be "too worthless," and their punishment "too well deserved, to excite our commiseration." Such a judgment would have an Aristotelian ring, I think, if we did not know the nature and reason for Hazlitt's demands upon audience sympathy.

Hazlitt skips briefly over Heywood, Middleton and Rowley, stopping, however, to characterize Heywood's "imagination." "As Marlowe's imagination glows like a furnace, Heywood's is a gentle, lambent flame that purifies without consuming." Marston and Chapman are not "imaginative" primarily, but they are criticized in terms of Hazlitt's conception of the "sympathetic imagination." In Hazlitt's view, Marston cannot properly be considered a tragic writer, for there is too much of the saturnine and cynical in his disposition. "[His] forte was not sympathy." Chapman too lacks

1Works, VI, 207. 2Ibid., p. 211. 3Ibid. 4Ibid., pp. 211-12. 5Ibid., p. 224.
the ideal psychological make up necessary for the writing of tragedy. "Our author aims at the highest things in poetry, and tries in vain, wanting imagination and passion, to fill up the epic moulds of tragedy with sense and reason alone." ¹

Dekker and Webster are both true poets of the "imagination." Dekker's "imagination" is of the Chaucerian kind, says Hazlitt. ² Like Chaucer, Dekker lacks the sort of passionate imagination which vivifies and glorifies its subject.³ He also expresses the same sort of restrained truth to human character which Chaucer does, depicting only the characters' "habitual, deeply rooted feelings." ⁴ Comparing Dekker with Webster, Hazlitt says,

Dekker has, I think, more truth of character, more instinctive depth of sentiment, more of the unconscious simplicity of nature; but he does not, out of his own stores, clothe his subject with ... the same glowing colours of language. Dekker excels in giving expression to certain habitual, deeply-rooted feelings, which remain pretty much the same in all circumstances, the simple uncompounded elements of nature and passion.⁵

But Webster's "imagination" is passionate and dramatic; and therefore it portrays human passions in all their complexity and fluidity. In the following comparison of the two dramatists, Hazlitt once again uses the word "historic" to denote the concrete but static picture of human nature as opposed to the concrete and dynamic representation. Dekker excels in giving expression to "habitual feelings" which remain much the same in all circumstances,

¹ Works, VI, 230. ² Ibid., p. 240. ³ Ibid. ⁴ Ibid. ⁵ Ibid.
Webster gives more scope to their various combinations and changeable aspects, brings them into *dramatic* play by contrast and comparison, flings them into a state of fusion by a kindled fancy, makes them describe a wider arc of oscillation from the impulse of unbridled passion. . . . Deckar is contented with the *historic* picture of suffering; Webster goes on to suggest horrible imaginings. 1 (Italics mine.)

The Shakespearean attributes are all here—dynamic change, fusion, suggestion.

With Webster, the "poetry of imagination" comes to an end. The seeds of the decline were already present, however, in the poetry of Beaumont and Fletcher. Although the decadent drama is not "poetry of imagination," I believe a discussion of it is relevant here, for Hazlitt's analysis derives in great part from his theory of the Shakespearean tragedy of the "imagination." The "poetry of fancy" could almost be defined in terms of the work of Beaumont and Fletcher; and it is interesting to find Hazlitt identifying elements of "the poetry of paradox" and "the poetry of common-places" not only in the writings of Beaumont and Fletcher, but in those of Massinger and Ford as well.

In the opening sentences of the chapter on Beaumont and Fletcher, Hazlitt says,

Beaumont and Fletcher, with all their prodigious merits, appear to me the first writers who in some measure departed from the genuine tragic style of the age of Shakespear. They thought less of their subject, and more of themselves, than some others. 2

Their "dramatic paradoxes" are "tinted with an infusion of

personal vanity.\(^1\) Their plays are characterized by a striving for effect for the sake of effect: "They would have a catastrophe in every scene."\(^2\) Their work "stimulates more than it gratifies, and leaves the mind in a certain sense exhausted and unsatisfied."\(^3\) Comparing these effects with the ideal ones produced by Shakespearean tragedy, one finds them obviously inferior.

Hazlitt grants that these two men had "great and unquestioned command over the stores both of fancy and passion:"\(^4\) their fault lay in their willful misuse of them. Furthermore, other virtues of composition attendant upon the true "sympathetic imagination" are not present in the plays of Beaumont and Fletcher. Of particular importance, the characters are not true to nature, not psychologically valid. An analysis of the motivation of these characters reveals not true "hidden springs" of action, but instead grossly improbable ones which result from fabrication of rather than submission to nature. Hazlitt finds *The Maid's Tragedy* "one of the poorest."\(^5\)

There is no sort of reason, ... why the kind should marry off his mistress to one of his courtiers, why he should pitch upon the worthiest for this purpose, why he should, by such a choice, break off Amintor's match with the sister of another principal support of his throne, ... why he should insist on the inviolable fidelity of his former mistress to him after she is married.\(^6\)

Not only are the characters of the play unconvincing

psychologically; they are insufficient as human beings, both faults inhibiting the moral effects of tragedy. The hero of one tragedy is too "feeble" and "irresolute."¹ Of another, the "haughty voluptuousness and pampered effeminacy of his character, admit neither respect for his misfortunes, nor pity for his errors."² Hazlitt singles out for praise two passages from The False One which do exalt man. The descriptions of the dead Pompey have sufficient "solemnity and grandeur."³

Nothing can cover his high fame but heaven; No pyramids set off his memories, But the eternal substance of his greatness, To which I leave him.⁴

Beaumont and Fletcher failed in sympathy with other human beings, thought too much of themselves, and produced inferior tragedy, neither moral nor true. But although they are "dramatic poets of the second class," they are still "lyrical ... poets of the first order."⁵ Fletcher in particular is praised as a lyric poet. In The Faithful Shepherdess, "the author has ... given a loose to his fancy, and his fancy was his most delightful and genial quality."⁶ Here, of course, we are no longer speaking of dramatic tragedy.

The songs and lyrical descriptions throughout are luxuriant and delicate in a high degree. He came near to Spenser in a certain tender and voluptuous sense of natural beauty; he came near to Shakespear in the playful and fantastic expression of it.⁷

¹Works, VI, 251. ²Ibid., p. 252. ³Ibid., p. 253. ⁴Ibid., p. 254. ⁵Ibid., p. 249. ⁶Ibid., p. 254. ⁷Ibid.
This poetry of beauty and delight, of "playful and fantastic expression," is not the "poetry of the imagination." Instead, it is the "poetry of fancy." It can excel, but without revealing the truth of nature, and without moving its audience to sympathy. Its effect is delight, not moral improvement. It may adorn tragedy, but it may also adorn comedy, and interfere with the spirit of neither.

But the poetry of Beaumont and Fletcher is not all pure poetry of fancy, and may even contain elements proper to the "poetry of commonplaces" and the "poetry of paradox." One mark of the first is the absence of genuine feeling, and a corresponding affectation of real inspiration.

Beaumont and Fletcher were the first also who laid the foundation of the artificial diction and tinselled pomp of the next generation of poets, by aiming at a profusion of ambitious ornaments, and by translating the commonest circumstances into the language of metaphor and passion.¹

One characteristic of the second is an obvious discord between logic and feeling, indicating a subservience of the latter to the former. The modern "tragedy of paradox" is frequently based upon some social theory; and its characters are made to speak in terms of the theory, instead of on the terms of nature itself.² This sort of falsification of nature appears in a passage from The Faithful Shepherdess, in which one character pleads to his beloved not to grant his suit for the logical reason that "if you yield, I die to all affection."³ Hazlitt scoffs at such "paltry quibbling": "A pedant may hang his

¹Works, VI, 250. ²Ibid., pp. 360-61. ³Ibid., p. 255.
affections on the point of a dilemma in this manner; but nature does not sophisticate; or when she does, it is to gain her ends, not to defeat them.\textsuperscript{1}

Massinger and Ford are more exclusively dominated by logic rather than by passionate sympathy. "I find little in the works of these two dramatists, but a display of great strength and subtlety of understanding, inveteracy of purpose, and perversity of will."\textsuperscript{2} Their work shocks or perplexes, but it does not please. Massinger's manner is "hard and repulsive."\textsuperscript{3} Ford, in whom there is too much "scholastic subtlety," does not work upon our sympathy but upon our antipathy or indifference.\textsuperscript{4}

The most obvious symptom of dramatic incompetence is, as usual, a false representation or presentation of human character. Massinger's failures in this respect are colossal ones:

In the intellectual processes which he delights to describe, 'reason panders will:' he fixes arbitrarily on some object which there is no motive to pursue, or every motive combined against it, and then by screwing up his heroes ... to the deliberate and blind accomplishment of this, thinks to arrive at the 'true pathos and sublime of human life.' That is not the way. He seldom touches the heart or kindles the fancy.\textsuperscript{5}

In The Duke of Milan, Sforza's resolution to destroy his wife is unnatural, and the effect is both "unexpected and revolting, from the want of any circumstances of palliation leading to it."\textsuperscript{6} The psychological effect produced by the character of

\textsuperscript{1}Works, VI, 250. \textsuperscript{2}Ibid., p. 265. \textsuperscript{3}Ibid., p. 266
\textsuperscript{4}Ibid. \textsuperscript{5}Ibid. \textsuperscript{6}Ibid., pp. 266-67.
Francesco is the reverse of what it should be. The revelation that his motives were generous instead of sinister "produces a double sense of incongruity, and instead of satisfying the mind, renders it totally incredulous."\(^1\) The character of Sir Giles Overreach is almost the opposite of that of a great Shakespearean character. He is an abstract type, in which one evil trait is used to stand for the whole man. The picture of the human soul is distorted, the element of evil exaggerated.\(^2\) Hazlitt's objections to Ford are similar to his objections to Massinger: The characters act against nature. Even the imagery is harsh and ugly rather than beautiful.\(^3\)

**Conclusion**

The conclusions one may draw from this survey of the "poetry of the imagination" are several. In the first place, the "poetry of the imagination" is not all one thing. It allows for the concrete naturalism of Shakespeare and Chaucer along with the more ideal mode of Milton and Spenser. The type of character portrayal in Shakespeare differs vastly from that in Chaucer; while Spenser hardly portrays character at all. The relatively commonplace world of Chaucer contrasts with that of Milton and Spenser. And to anticipate a possible charge that all these things contradict one another, one need only point to the example of Shakespeare in whose work all these elements are present: the sublime, the low; the fairy

tale, the natural.

Also, all these poets of the "imagination" are great, but in varying degree. They are great because all fix the reader's attention on something outside the self—riveting his sympathy to a world beyond. All lead the reader to a contemplation of some truth, whether it be naturalistically objective, or more exclusively psychological. And all lead the reader to see the beauty and sublimity of the objects of nature.

But Chaucer, Milton, and Spenser are less moral and true than Shakespeare. None of their work produces the effect of sympathetic compassion as Shakespearean tragedy does, because none contains so intense or complete a picture of human passion. One cannot say with certitude that Hazlitt would rank Milton above Chaucer, Chaucer above Spenser. And yet Milton's grand, impassioned view of nature would seem to me to take precedence over Chaucer's cool, more commonplace one. And Chaucer's focus on humanity would probably be considered greater than Spenser's sensuous pageant, which appeals more to the eye than to the mind, will, or heart.
CHAPTER III

THE POETRY OF FANCY

It is more difficult to locate and describe Hazlitt's conception of the "poetry of fancy" than any of the other four categories of poetry which he enumerated in the essay "On Dryden and Pope." There are several reasons for this: Hazlitt nowhere makes a clear, unequivocal statement concerning the poets of "fancy" corresponding to that in which he identifies Chaucer, Spenser, Shakespeare, and Milton as "poets of imagination." He says very little about the poets with whom he does apparently connect "fancy" as the ruling psychological faculty. And finally, Hazlitt's failure to formally distinguish "fancy" from "imagination" is a difficulty which must be grappled with. In spite of these obstacles, I believe that one can say without distorting or overstating the case, that Hazlitt has a concept of the "poetry of fancy" which coincides reasonably well with a concept of "fancy" as a faculty inferior to the "imagination."

That Hazlitt treats fancy as an inferior faculty was pointed out in the introduction. Although Hazlitt frequently uses the words "fancy" and "imagination" as synonyms, he reserves the word "fancy" to refer to the inferior grades of their common definition; and Hazlitt refers to "fancy" in a
derogatory and condescending manner which he seldom uses when referring to "imagination." In contrast to the "imagination," "fancy" frequently operates not in opposition to, but in conjunction with "wit," and can evidently achieve its highest ends independent of passion and feeling. But in addition, Hazlitt consistently denies "fancy" those high associations with truth and morality which distinguish the "sympathetic imagination" as the highest creative principle of poetry.

One must derive Hazlitt's concept of the "poetry of fancy" in a comparatively indirect manner, since Hazlitt makes no overt statements concerning the subject. However, Hazlitt does describe in a uniform and consistent way a distinctive type of poetry with which "fancy" appears associated as the psychological source. This poetic type clearly contrasts with the poetry of "imagination."

In the first place, the "poetry of imagination" is created only by those poets in whom the highest moral and intellectual potentialities are fully developed. Impassioned poetry is an emanation of the moral and intellectual part of our nature, as well as of the sensitive—of the desire to know, the will to act, and the power to feel; and ought to appeal to these different parts of our constitution, in order to be perfect.¹

Hazlitt expresses the same idea more clearly and emphatically when he says that

¹Works, V, 6.
The poet of nature is one who, from the elements of beauty, of power, and of passion in his own breast, sympathises with whatever is beautiful, and grand, and impassioned in nature, . . . in its immediate appeal to the senses, to the thoughts and hearts of all men; so that the poet of nature, by the truth, and depth, and harmony of his mind, may be said to hold communion with the very soul of nature.\(^1\)

In contrast, the "poetry of fancy" seems to come from personalities whose moral and intellectual qualities are somehow stunted. The most striking evidence of this is that Hazlitt almost invariably describes the fanciful poet as "effeminate." The "effeminate" personality, according to Hazlitt, is one dominated by physical sensations to such a degree that his ordinary powers of mind and will become impaired. The will is paralysed because effeminate natures need to be perpetually engulfed in "agreeable sensations."\(^2\) Therefore, the effeminate personality cannot freely and knowingly embrace "pain, or labour, or danger, or death."\(^3\) Feeling and thought is likewise stifled in sweet, voluptuous sensation; and thus, the "imagination" becomes "ennervated."\(^4\) But evidently, not the "fancy."

The appeal of the "poetry of fancy" is an limited as the mental and moral resources of the poets who write it. As indicated by the quotations above, the poetry of "nature" or "imagination" appeals to the whole man—to sense, thought, and feeling. The "poetry of fancy" appeals almost exclusively to the sense. Hazlitt makes no general statement concerning the effect of the "poetry of fancy." However, he does make a general statement concerning the "effeminate style"

\(^{1}\) Works, V, 69. \(^{2}\) Ibid., VIII, 248.
\(^{3}\) Ibid., p, 249. \(^{4}\) Ibid.
to which the styles of individual poets of "fancy" correspond. (This style is perhaps the most important identifying characteristic of the "poetry of fancy."") "By an effeminate style I would be understood to mean one that is all florid, all fine; that cloy by its sweetness, and tires by its sameness."¹ Such poets "only aim to please, and never offend by truth or disturb by singularity. Every thought must be beautiful per se, every expression equally fine."²

Spenser's poetical temperament was as "effeminate" as Chaucer's was "stern and masculine,"³ and Spenser's poetry, although basically of the "imagination" tended in the direction of the "poetry of fancy." "His versification is a labyrinth of sweet sounds . . . that would cloy by their very sweetness."⁴ A passage in "The Bower of Bliss" has "all that voluptuous pathos, and languid brilliancy of fancy, in which this writer excelled."⁵ Beaumont and Fletcher, referred to as having "great and unquestioned . . . stores . . . of fancy,"⁶ have a characteristically "effeminate" style. The reader finds "enthusiasm bordering on extravagance, richness running riot, beauty dissolving in its own sweetness."⁷

The two basic attributes of the effeminate, fanciful style—its lack of depth, its smothering sweetness are given to Beaumont and Fletcher in the following:

¹Works, VIII, 254. ²Ibid. ³Ibid., V, 20. ⁴Ibid., p. 44. ⁵Ibid., p. 36. ⁶Ibid., VI, 248. ⁷Ibid., p. 249.
Or they are two goodly trees, the stateliest of the forest, crowned with blossoms, and with the verdure springing at their feet; but they do not strike their roots far enough into the ground, and the fruit can hardly ripen for the flowers! ¹

(Hazlitt almost always identifies the "poetry of fancy" with such floral imagery. His repetition of such words as "languid," "delicate," "voluptuous," "sweet," to describe characteristic effects is also noteworthy.)

**Beaumont and Fletcher**

Hazlitt's chapter on the post-Elizabethan drama affords the strongest proof that Hazlitt did conceive a "poetry of fancy" inferior in kind to the "poetry of imagination." According to Hazlitt's historical scheme of English literature, the "poetry of imagination" declined into the "poetry of fancy" in the immediately post-Elizabethan time. ² And since the chapter on Beaumont and Fletcher follows a whole series of lectures in which Elizabethan literature has been characterized as imaginative, the fact that Beaumont and Fletcher are allowed "fancy" but not "imagination" is significant indeed. There can be no doubt that in Hazlitt's mind, the works of Beaumont and Fletcher indicate a decline in literary genius. "Beaumont and Fletcher, with all their prodigious merits, appear to me the first writers who . . . departed from the genuine tragic style of the age of Shakespeare." ³

Neither the tragic nor the lyric productions of Beaumont and Fletcher achieve what imaginative poetry does; their works are inferior in content and effect. A psycho-

¹*Works, VI, 249.* ²*Ibid., V, 82.* ³*Ibid., VI, 248.*
logical deficiency makes these two necessarily "dramatic poets of the second class." They cannot create character because they lack the necessary sympathy. "The characters in general do not take a substantial form, or excite a growing interest, or leave a permanent impression."\(^1\) Lacking the necessary moral dignity and intellectual grandeur Beaumont and Fletcher create characters and general effects which are almost repulsive. They do not have the sort of imaginative strength necessary to maintain a proper balance of feeling in their manipulation of tragic subjects, for example.

There is a too frequent mixture of voluptuous softness or effeminacy of character with horror in the subjects, a conscious weakness . . . of moral constitution struggling with wilful and violent situations, like the tender wings of a moth, attracted to the flame that dazzles and consumes it.\(^2\)

Without concrete representation of character, without the appeal of a "grand" figure, the avenues to sympathy are cut off, and thus also the tragic effect. There is little truth in conception, and therefore no moral result—no cultivation of general benevolence.

Finding these poets to be dramatists of the second class, Hazlitt does allow them to be lyric poets of the first order. Here, Hazlitt identifies lyrical excellence with "fancy." After praising the lyric beauty of Fletcher's *Faithful Shepherdess*, he says:

The author has in it given a loose to his fancy, and his fancy was his most delightful and genial quality.

\(^1\) *Works*, VI, 249. \(^2\) Ibid.
The songs and lyrical descriptions throughout are luxuriant and delicate in a high degree. He came near to Spenser in a certain tender and voluptuous sense of natural beauty; he came near to Shakespeare in the playful and fantastic expression of it. But even the lyrical "fancy" appears to be inferior to the lyrical "imagination." Because of the implied contrast of "fancy" and "imagination" which it contains, Hazlitt's comparison of Fletcher's Faithful Shepherdess to Milton's Comus is an important one.

In reading the Faithful Shepherdess, we find ourselves breathing the moonlight air under the copy of heaven, and wander by forest side or fountain, among fresh dews and flowers, following our vagrant fancies, or smit with the love of nature's works. It reading Milton's Comus, and most of his other works, we seem to be entering a lofty dome raised over our heads and ascending to the skies, and as if nature and everything in it were but a temple and an image consecrated by the poet's art to the worship of virtue and pure religion. (Italics mine.)

Thus, the fanciful poet may perceive natural beauty, evidently, but not the Miltonic grandeur and sublimity which stem from an imaginative insight into nature. Certainly, the "fancy" never connects beauty with the worship of "virtue and pure religion," for "fancy" seems to deal with the tangible and the earthbound. Nor does the poet of "fancy" penetrate the "life and motion" of Shakespearean nature. In Hazlitt's sense of the word, "fancy" is "abstract." It isolates from nature a kind of heavy perfume, but it leaves behind the living reality.

Thus, Beaumont and Fletcher's works are neither moral nor true. The appeal of their works is primarily an appeal.

1Works, VI, p. 254. 2Ibid., 256
to the senses. The "richness running riot" and the "beauty dissolving in its own sweetness" have already been referred to. But the tragic effect itself has been reduced by them to pure sensationalism. Nowhere do these poets touch the heart or mind, or arouse feeling, will, and intellect by stirring the "imagination." This seems to be Hazlitt's meaning, at any rate, when he criticizes the two poets for attempting to satisfy a "misplaced and inordinate craving after striking effect and continual excitement."¹ "Their serious poetry . . . stimulates more than it gratifies, and leaves the mind in a certain sense exhausted and unsatisfied."² Hazlitt offers historical reasons to account for Beaumont and Fletcher's sensationalism.

The example of preceding or contemporary writers had given them facility; the frequency of dramatic exhibition had advanced the popular taste; and this facility of production, and the necessity for appealing to popular applause, tended to vitiate their own taste, and make them willing to pamper that of the public for novelty and extraordinary effect.³

The effect of their poetry is obviously a cloying one, the result of over-stimulation:

They would have a catastrophe in every scene; so that you have none at the last: they would raise admiration to its height in every line; so that the impression of the whole is comparatively loose and desultory. They pitch the characters at first in too high a key, and exhaust themselves by the eagerness and impatience of their efforts.⁴

The association of "fancy" with tragedy and then with lyric here indicates the difficulty of identifying "fancy"

¹ Works, VI, 250-51. ² Ibid., p. 249.
³ Ibid., p. 248. ⁴ Ibid., pp. 248-49.
with a literary kind. The "sympathetic imagination" is essential to Hazlitt's conception of tragedy and epic; "wit" is essential to Hazlitt's conception of comic or satirical poetry. It might be supposed that Hazlitt would identify descriptive poetry with "fancy" since he connects "fancy" and natural beauty consistently. This, however, is not the case. "Fancy" can appear as an element of tragic writing and of comic writing—in the fundamentally imaginative works of Spenser and even Shakespeare; and in the fundamentally witty productions of Pope, Waller, and Rochester. Particularly in its weaker senses, it can adorn both tragedy and comedy, without fundamentally altering the spirit of either.

Thomas Moore

In the chapter on the "poetry of imagination," I pointed out that Hazlitt uses his concept of the "poetry of commonplaces" and the "poetry of paradoxes" to describe some of the effects of Beaumont and Fletcher's work, even though these poets belonged to the historical category of the "poetry of fancy." It will be seen later that Hazlitt applied "wit" and even "imagination" to poetry written outside the historical periods he primarily associated with them. But perhaps the most striking example of his application of a term outside its designated historical period occurs in Hazlitt's description of nineteenth century poetry, where alongside the dominant and vigorous "poetry of paradox" Hazlitt finds a new literary decadence, similar in its poetic
expression to the post-Elizabethan one. To the works of such nineteenth century poets, Hazlitt applies the term, "fancy," and the concept of the "poetry of fancy" just discussed. The most significant poet of the new decay, to judge from the extent of Hazlitt's comment upon him, is Thomas Moore.

Hazlitt probably uses the words, "fancy" and "fanciful," more frequently in connection with Thomas Moore than in connection with any other poet. At times, "fancy" will be used in a relatively meaningless context: "His fancy is forever on the wing, flutters in the gale, glitters in the sun." But more often, as will be seen in the quotations below, "fancy" appears in contexts which clearly limit its meaning. Therefore, when Hazlitt says that Moore's "principle of composition" leads to a "defect of . . . imagination," he is surely assuming a distinction between "imagination" and "fancy." Hazlitt even states that "fancy" is the psychological source of Moore's poetry in a clear and forceful way.

The poetry of Moore is essentially that of Fancy; the poetry of Byron that of Passion. If there is passion in the effusions of one, the fancy by which it is expressed predominates over it; if fancy is called to the aid of the other, it is still subservient to the passion.

When we turn to Moore's poetry itself, we find that it fits perfectly the general description of the literary type described in the preceding pages. Thomas Moore is first

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of all a shallow poet. His works lack thoughtfulness and truth, and are characterized by the absence of genuine feeling. Moore does not impose upon the public "the fatigue of thought or shock of feeling."¹ In his works there is merely "a play of fancy, a glitter of words, a shallowness of thought, and a want of truth and solidity that is wonderful, and that nothing but the heedless, rapid glide of the verse could render tolerable."² An effeminacy of temperament is evidenced by Moore's refusal to admit into his poetry "the sordid details of human life," "its sharp calamities."³ If for some reason he does admit the unpleasant elements, his "Muse throws a soft, glittering veil over them."⁴ In Lalla Rookh, "the interest ... is often highwrought and tragic, but the execution still turns to the effeminate and voluptuous side."⁵ Moore is simply unable to come to grips with any significant view of life.

Mr. Moore ought not to contend with serious difficulties or with entire subjects. He can write verses, not a poem. There is no principle of massing or of continuity in his productions—neither height nor breadth nor depth of capacity. There is no truth of representation, no strong internal feeling—but a continual flutter and display of affected airs and graces.⁶

Moore lacks sublimity, of course; and he knows little or nothing of human nature.

He wants intensity, strength, and grandeur. His mind does not brook over the great and permanent; it glances over the surfaces, the first impressions of things.

¹Works, XI, 170. ²Ibid., p. 173. ³Ibid., XVI, 413. ⁴Ibid. ⁵Ibid., V, 152. ⁶Ibid., XI, 173.
instead of grappling with the deep-rooted prejudices of the mind, its inveterate habits, and that 'perilous stuff that weighs upon the heart.' His pen, as it is rapid and fanciful, wants momentum and passion.¹

Hazlitt finds the Irish Melodies to be hopelessly lacking in passion and feeling. "If these prettinesses pass for patriotism, if a country can heave from its heart's core only these rapid, varnished sentiments, . . . let its tears of blood evaporate in an empty conceit, let it be governed as it has been."²

There is little mind and heart in Moore's poetry and no mention of its having any appeal to intellect or feeling. But typical of the "poetry of fancy" there is an exclusive appeal to sense. It is the great fault of Mr. Moore's poetry that it appeals too exclusively "to the flattering support of sense and fancy."³ Elsewhere, Hazlitt says Moore's poetry "glitters to the sense through an atmosphere of indifference."⁴ And in one interesting passage, Hazlitt compares the poet's works with the modern opera. "Modern poetry in its retrograde progress comes at last to be constructed on the principles of the modern OPERA, where an attempt is made to gratify every sense at every instant, and where the understanding alone is insulted and the heart mocked."⁵ In the following passage, Hazlitt seems to summarize the defects of the "poetry of fancy."

Critically speaking, Mr. Moore's poetry is chargeable with two peculiarities. First, the pleasure or

¹Works, V, 151. ²Ibid., XI, 174.
³Ibid., XVI, 414. ⁴Ibid., p. 413. ⁵Ibid., XI, 170.
interest he conveys to us is almost always derived from the first impressions or physical properties of objects, not from their connection with passion or circumstances. His lights dazzle the eye, his perfumes soothe the smell, his sounds ravish the ear: but then they do so for and from themselves, and at all times and places equally—for the heart has nothing to do with it.\footnote{Works, XVI, 413.}

An attempt to gratify the senses at every instant may satisfy the degraded, artificial taste of the age, but that is all. In his criticism of Moore for pampering the "craving of the public mind after novelty and effect," there are echoes of the lecture on Beaumont and Fletcher.

Sooner than not stimulate and delight the reader, he is willing to be tawdry, or superficial, or commonplace. \ldots \ It has been too much our author's object to pander to the artificial taste of the age; and his productions, however brilliant and agreeable, are in consequence somewhat meretricious and effeminate.\footnote{Ibid., XI, 170.}

However, one has the feeling that even "the public" would eventually become sickened by the excess of sweetness: "He indeed cloys with sweetness; he obscures with splendour; he fatigues with gaiety."\footnote{Ibid., p. 171.} Or Hazlitt evokes the stifling effect figuratively. "Mr. Moore's poetry is the thornless rose—its touch is velvet, its hue vermilion, and its graceful form is cast in beauty's mould."\footnote{Ibid., XVI, 414.}

His verse is like a shower of beauty; a dance of images; a stream of music; or like the spray of the waterfall, tinged by the morning-beam with rosy light. The characteristic distinction of our author's style is this continuous and incessant flow of voluptuous thoughts and shining allusions.\footnote{Ibid., XI, 169.}
Hazlitt has surprisingly little to say about Keats. This seems puzzling since he seems to have liked and admired both the man and his work, and since he might be expected to have found at least a rudimentary embodiment of his favorite ideas in Keats' poetry.¹ And yet, I do not believe that Hazlitt was actually equipped to analyze Keats' poetry at much length, or very explicitly. The concept of objectivity of sympathetic imagination, is associated in Hazlitt's mind with Shakespearean tragedy. And Hazlitt always looks to a long poem of any kind rather than to the lyric as the real test of a poet's ability. Keats' greatest poetry is insufficiently dramatic in Hazlitt's sense of the term, for drama means to Hazlitt not the creation of plot, but the representation of character, or at least the interaction of plot and character. Nor can Hazlitt criticize Keats in terms of the epic imagination. (He does not mention the Hyperion fragments, at any rate.)

Deprived, in a way, of his customary point of departure, Hazlitt's praise of Keats is uniformly vague, or at least general. "Keats gave the greatest promise of genius

of any poet of his day. ... Some of his shorter and later pieces are, however, as free from faults as they are full of beauties.¹ "Keats's fine fancy and powerful invention were too obvious to be treated with mere neglect."² Hazlitt does not offer concrete reasons to explain his preference for a particular poem. Although he can be quite lucid about why he dislikes Shelley, he cannot (or does not) say why, in comparison, he prefers Keats. "Shelley's Hymn of Pan we do not consider equal to Mr. Keats's sounding lines in the Endymion"³ suffices as a comparison of the two poems. In a comment on "The Eve of Saint Agnes," Hazlitt mentions the poem's "beautiful and tender images" and "rich poetic blazonry" without further elaboration.⁴

Much of Hazlitt's admiration for Keats is revealed in his consistent defense of the poet from the attacks of the Tory journals.⁵ Since Keats was not "ushered into the world with the court-stamp upon him," he was to be "crushed as a warning to genius how it keeps company with honesty, and as a sure means of inoculating the ingenuous spirit and talent of the country with timely and systematic servility!"⁶ Praise and defense are united in the following:

Indeed it has been remarked that Mr. Keats resembles

¹Works, IX, 244-45. ²Ibid., XVI, 237.
³Ibid., p. 279. ⁴Ibid., XII, 225.
⁵Thorpe discusses Hazlitt's defense of Keats against the critics in detail, pp. 496-501.
⁶Works, XVI, 237.
Shakespeare in the novelty and eccentricity of his combinations of style. If so, it is the only thing in which he is like Shakespeare; and yet Mr. Keats, whose misfortune and crime it is, like Milton, to have been born in London, is a much better poet than Mr. Wilson, or his Patroclus, Mr. Lockhart; nay farther, if Sir Walter Scott (the sly Ulysses of the Auld Reekie school,) had written many of the passages in Mr. Keats' poems, they would have been quoted as the most beautiful in his works.¹

In spite of this praise, it is apparent that Keats' poetry belongs, in Hazlitt's opinion, to the inferior category of the "poetry of fancy." Hazlitt mentions Keats' "fancy" several times, but the most significant statement about "fancy" appears in a series of remarks on Endymion. In this poem, "there is a want of action, of character, and so far, of imagination, but there is exquisite fancy."² As a matter of fact, Hazlitt's criticism of Endymion, which is in the concluding paragraph of the essay, "On Effeminacy of Character," describes Keats fully as a poet of "fancy": There is an absence of sympathetic identification. "He painted his own thoughts and character."³ The effect of the poem is confined to the delightfulness of the sensuous beauty conveyed. And the poem has an effeminate quality. "All is soft and fleshy, without bone or muscle."⁴ The passage as a whole is as follows:

I cannot help thinking that the fault of Mr. Keats' poems was a deficiency in masculine energy of style. He had beauty, tenderness, delicacy, in an uncommon degree, but there was a want of strength and substance. His Endymion is a very delightful description of the illusions of a youthful imagination, given up to airy

¹Works, XVIII, 368n. ²Ibid., VIII, 255. ³Ibid. ⁴Ibid.
dreams—we have flowers, clouds, rainbows, moonlight, all sweet sounds and smells, and Oreads and Dryads flitting by—but there is nothing tangible in it, nothing marked or palpable. . . . He painted his own thoughts and character; and did not transport himself into the fabulous and heroic ages. There is a want of action, of character, and so far, of imagination, but there is exquisite fancy. All is soft and fleshy, without bone or muscle. We see in him the youth, without the manhood of poetry.  

And Endymion does abound with illustrations of what Hazlitt calls "fancy." Over and over again, and almost without variation, the imagery appropriate to quiet bowers, heavy-scented sleep, and dreams is evoked—trance inducing poppies, incense, the drone of humming bees. "Ripened fruitage," luxuriant vegetation fill the enervating atmosphere. Typical of the setting of the poem as a whole, we have the silent peacefulness of Peona's bower, in which Endymion sleeps:

so the quiet maid
Held her peace: so that a whispering blade
Of grass, a wailful gnat, a bee bustling
Down in the blue bells, or a wren light-rustling
Among sere leaves and twigs, might all be heard.

Book I, ll. 448-52

An exclusive emphasis upon the physical beauty of mortals and immortals alike reduces the element of character at times to a minimum. There is rarely a fusion of details yielding an impression of a whole personality. Instead the poet forces his reader to contemplate the characters' physical appearance, part by part, detail by detail. He lingers over Endymion's vision of

her hovering feet,
More bluely vein'd, more soft, more whitely

1Works, VIII, 254-55.
Than those of sea-born Venus, when she rose
From out her cradle shell.

The description of the sleeping Adonis is an epitome of the
"poetry of fancy" and of the human form seen as static, iso-
lated physical detail.

Sideway his face repos'd
On one white arm, and tenderly unclos'd
By tenderest pressure, a faint damask mouth
To slumbery pout; just as the morning south
Disparts a dew-lipped rose. Above his head
Four lily stalks did their white honours wed
To make a coronal; and round him grew
All tendrils green, of every bloom and hue,
Together intertwinar'd and trammel'd fresh:

Finally, action may simply consist in a dream of voluptuous
experience.

I e'en dar'd to press
Her very cheek against my crowned lip
And at that moment felt my body dip
Into a warmer air: a moment more,
Our feet were soft in flowers. There was store
Of newest joys upon that alp. Sometimes
A scent of violets, and blossoming limes,
Made delicate from all white-flower bells;
And once, above the edges of our nest,
An arch face peep'd,--an Oread, as I guess'd.

Thomas Campbell

Thomas Campbell is the only other poet whom Hazlitt
identifies as a poet of "fancy." One of Campbell's poems
appears to Hazlitt "like the ecstatic union of natural
beauty and poetic fancy."¹ Hazlitt even refers to Campbell's
"power and scope both of thought and fancy."² Only one of

¹Works, XI, 162. ²Ibid., IX, 243.
the passages connects Campbell's "fancy" with an inferior meaning of the term, and this passage refers to the "voluptuous fancy" that "raises and adorns the fairy fabric of Campbell's thought."¹

However, I do not think there is much doubt that Campbell's "fancy" is of the variety discussed in this chapter. For in discussing Campbell's poetry, Hazlitt uses his favorite method of evoking the effect of the "poetry of fancy" by comparing it to the heavy odors and rich colors, the tenderness and sweetness of flowers. "Mr. Campbell's poetry often reminds us of the purple gilliflower, both for its colour and its scent, its glowing warmth, its rich, languid, sullen hue."² There are passages in Gertrude of Wyoming which have "an air of tenderness and sweetness over the whole, like the breath of flowers."³ Speaking in another place of the love scenes in Gertrude, Hazlitt says:

The love-scenes in Gertrude of Wyoming breathe a balmy voluptuousness of sentiment; but they are generally broken off in the middle; they are like the scent of a bank of violets, faint and rich, which the gale suddenly conveys in a different direction.⁴

Also, Campbell's works are shallow and superficial, as evidenced by the artificiality of his methods, which betrays his lack of feeling, and the triviality of his concerns. The Pleasures of Hope is altogether too artificial in its construction.⁵ Particularly the plot of Gertrude of

¹ Works, XI, 162. ² Ibid., p.160. ³ Ibid., IX, 243. ⁴ Ibid., V, 150. ⁵ Ibid., IX, 243.
Wyoming suffers from this defect. In addition to the fact that there is too much obvious balance and antithesis in its composition—a forced artificiality—Hazlitt makes fun of the punctual appearances of a certain Indian at particularly melodramatic moments.\(^1\) This Indian is, in Hazlitt's opinion, "the most wonderful instance on record of poetical reliability."\(^2\)

Hazlitt's most vicious charge is that Campbell is more concerned with how his poetry will look when printed than he is with its content and effect. "Mr. Campbell always seems to me to be thinking how his poetry will look when it comes to be hot pressed on superfine wove paper, to have a disproportionate eye to points and commas, and dread of errors of the press."\(^3\)

**Nineteenth Century Drama and the Opera**

The foregoing are the only poets whom Hazlitt identifies as poets of "fancy." However, the poetic type appears in the drama of Hazlitt's time, for Hazlitt considers that much modern drama, like much modern poetry, is written, not to evoke sympathy, but to stimulate the sense. The result is the complete stifling of the "imagination." "An appeal to the understanding or the imagination is superfluous, where the senses are assailed on all sides."\(^4\) Now "character and probability are repeatedly sacrificed" to the production of external effect.\(^5\) Thus, the modern dramatist sacrifices truth. He also sacrifices feeling. Whereas one scene from

\(^1\) *Works*, V, 150.  
\(^2\) Ibid.  
\(^3\) Ibid., p. 149.  
\(^4\) Ibid., V, 367.  
\(^5\) Ibid., p. 368.
Richard L. Sheil's *Adelaide* should call for an audience response of passionate sympathy, the author, instead of having his actress express her emotions intelligibly, substitutes the mere signs of passions, which prove to be meaningless, bloodcurdling screams. "We are not in an ordinary mood prepared for the shrieks of mandrakes. ... Strong passion must be invested with imagination by someone." Hazlitt objects to the current theatrical convention which encourages a writer to pay more attention to the trappings of his play than to the play itself. In a review of *The Conquest of Toronto* by J. S. Dimond, he says:

In a word, the author resembles those painters of history who pay more attention to their back-ground than their figures, to costume and drapery than to the expression of thought and sentiment.

... We cannot attend to sounding epithets while a castle is tumbling about our ears, and it is sufficiently alarming to see an infant thrown from a precipice, reflections apart.

Since Hazlitt compares the effect of both modern drama and modern poetry to that produced by opera, his criticism of opera as a form is relevant to the present discussion, I think. Hazlitt's distaste for this breed of what he considered to be dramatic tragedy seems to be a culmination and summary of all of which he disapproves in the "poetry of fancy," and in a way, once more reminds us of the ideal which he sought,—insight into reality, sympathy with human nature, the moral improvement of mankind. To begin with reality:

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"In the grand carnival of the senses ... the pulse of life is suspended, the link which binds us to humanity is broken." As for sympathy,

Just so much of human misery is given as is proper to lull those who are exempted from it into a deeper sense of their own security: just enough of the picture of human life is shewn to relieve their languor, without disturbing their indifference. ... Every impression that, left to itself, might sink deep into the mind, and wake it to real sympathy, is overtaken and baffled by means of some other impression, plays round the surface of the imagination, ... /and/ expires in an empty pageant.2

Hazlitt concludes with an increasingly theatrical flourish.

\[\text{[Opera]}\] may serve to assist the euthanasia of the British character ... and British morals,—by hardening the heart, while it softens the senses, and dissolving every manly and generous feeling in an atmosphere of voluptuous effeminacy.3

**Conclusion**

I do not think there is much evidence to prove that Hazlitt's concept of the "poetry of fancy" and his evaluation of it as a literary type derives from any clear cut conception of "fancy" as a psychological faculty. We know that "wit" and "imagination" produce opposing kinds of images, and have a contrasting relation to truthfulness of perception and a contrasting relation to moral behavior. We do not know exactly, on the other hand, what "fancy" produces in imagery, for example; or how through an activity of a certain kind it connects man and nature. We only know that Hazlitt associates "fancy," on the negative side, with the unfeeling and the untrue; and on the positive side, with the perception

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1Ibid., XX, 95. 2Ibid. 3Ibid., p. 96.
of sensuous beauty. Clearly, Hazlitt associates the same qualities with the "poetry of fancy."

That the "poetry of fancy" lacks feeling and truth is evidenced by the fact that, particularly at its worst, it is totally lacking in the values conferred by the "imagination" upon the literature it inspires—insight into reality and morality of effect. The "poetry of fancy" is also uniformly associated with sensuous beauty. But since fanciful literature frequently sacrifices any appeal to intellect, feeling, and will, to the gratification of sense alone, its sensuous beauty, without moral and intellectual company, is hardly valuable at all. In the "poetry of imagination," beauty, in combination with truth, has the power of evoking sympathy. But in the "poetry of fancy" beauty may only de-humanize, and encourage selfishness.

Since Hazlitt's historical scheme of English literature designates "the poetry of fancy" as the second highest literary type, it seems surprising that Hazlitt condemns so much of the "poetry of fancy" discussed in this chapter as severely as he does. There is a good explanation for this, however. Because Hazlitt's concept of "fancy" is relatively unstable, the connotations of "fancy" vary markedly according to the context in which they appear. At times, "fancy" is used as a synonym for "imagination," as the introductory note on "fancy" showed. When Hazlitt uses "fancy" to describe Spenser's poetry, it is no longer synonymous with "imagination," but the term still remains in the favorable context of passion.
and feeling. And "fancy" remains linked with passion and feeling even as it is used to refer to the tragedy of Beaumont and Fletcher, which Hazlitt ranks just below the Elizabethan tragedy of "imagination." "Fancy" appears many times in conjunction with the "poetry of wit": "The Rape of the Lock is the double refined essence of wit and fancy"--and this context again alters the meaning of the word, and its value. Sensuous beauty remains, but it is of a brittle, slightly intellectual nature. Actually, there is a poetry of "imagination and fancy" and a poetry of "wit and fancy" between which the tragedy of Beaumont and Fletcher could be said to genuinely occupy what W. P. Albrecht calls the "middle ground." ¹

The poetry which Hazlitt condemns so severely, however, belongs to none of the types mentioned above. The nineteenth century "poetry of fancy" constitutes another category of fanciful poetry, which could accurately be called the poetry of "sense and fancy." The source for Hazlitt's low estimation of this kind of "poetry of fancy," or (as one might call it) "poetry of the senses," might conceivably be his old hatred of the sensationalist theory of the mind which he vowed to make it his life's endeavor to combat. ² Hazlitt

¹Cf. W. P. Albrecht, PMLA, LXXV, 248n. "Fancy ... may designate not only a kind of middle ground distinct from both imagination and wit, but perhaps more often, the creative or combining faculty that includes imagination and does not always exclude wit. Its effects may be serious or comic, tender or caustic, true or false."

²Supra, pp. 1-5.
particularly abhorred the premise of the sensationists that man was naturally selfish; and in The Principles of Human Action, Hazlitt attempted to prove that man could only be naturally selfish if his mind were absolutely en-slaved to sense, and had no faculties enabling it to act freely. The theory of the "imagination" which he evolved to demonstrate the natural disinterestedness of the human mind is Hazlitt's primary weapon for defense. It seems, at any rate, that the "poetry of sense and fancy" by drowning the mind in sensation; stifling the operations of the intellect feeling, and will; ennervating the "imagination," would pervert this natural disinterestedness more than any other literary form.
CHAPTER IV

THE POETRY OF WIT

In the introductory chapter, there was a brief discussion of how, during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the use of the word "wit" as a critical term gradually diminished, and how increasingly pejorative meanings became associated with the term which was once used to denote poetry itself or the main principle of poetry. By Hazlitt's time, "wit" had become "only a relic of serious criticism," and in general use, it came to refer to "a form of the ludicrous more smart than humour."\(^1\) In the light of this degradation in the meaning of "wit," it is interesting that Hazlitt restores to it in a slightly altered manner some of its earlier neo-classic significances. Once again we find "wit" to be a principle of poetry, albeit not poetry in general, but a restricted, second-best kind of poetry.\(^2\) Once again "wit" denotes a faculty which manipulates ideas in a certain manner, making

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\(^1\)Wimsatt and Brooks, p. 243.

\(^2\)Joseph Warton also made "wit" a principle of "second class" poetry. In describing Warton's theory, Rene Wellek summarizes Warton's thought and quotes from him directly: "Pope belongs to a second class of poets, the 'men of wit and sense.' 'What is there transcendentally sublime and pathetic in Pope?' asks Warton, and his answer is almost entirely in the negative. . . . Pope's 'grand characteristical talent is satiric or moral poetry,' and 'wit and satire are transitory and perishable, but nature and passion are eternal.'" Wellek, I, 128-29.
both comparisons and distinctions between them. And once more "wit" is used to refer to refined, pointed, or elegant expression. However all these older meanings of "wit" which appear in Hazlitt take their shape and color from Hazlitt's more strictly modern conception of "wit" as a faculty necessarily divorced from passion and feeling—so that Hazlitt finds the most suitable effects of the "poetry of wit" to be comic and satirical.

Hazlitt says, in his essay "On Dryden and Pope," that "the poetry of wit" comes into prominence for the first time with the Restoration;\(^1\) however, in his essay "On Cowley, Butler, Suckling, Etherege, etc.," he locates the first manifestation of this type of poetry in an earlier period, in the "age of James and Charles I."\(^2\) Actually, we find that the "poetry of wit" comes into full flower in the Restoration with Butler's Hudibras, and then continues to flourish beyond the reign of Queen Anne in the works of Pope, Swift, Prior, and Gay.

Hazlitt's discussion of the "poetry of wit" does begin with a treatment of the poetry of the earlier period, with the "metaphysical poets," Donne, Davies, Crashaw, etc., "whose style was adopted and carried to a more dazzling and fantastic excess by Cowley in the following reign."\(^3\) But although the "metaphysical poets" were the first to use the method of "wit," their intended effects were serious ones, and as a result, they were not successful poets of "wit." My own discussion begins

\(^1\)Works, V, 82-83.  \(^2\)Ibid., VI, 49.  \(^3\)Ibid.
with the "metaphysical poets," historically the first, but
poetically the least of the poets of "wit" in Hazlitt's view.

As was point out in the introductory section on "wit,"
this faculty is distinguished from the "imagination" by the
manner in which it manipulates ideas. Opposed to the fusing,
associative power of the "imagination" is the dissociating
power of "wit," capable of achieving "the rapid analysis or
solution of continuity in our ideas."¹ Equally important,
though, is wit's power to join ideas together. But instead
of fusing the ideas as the "imagination" does "wit" merely
juxtaposes them; and the union is incongruous, unnatural,
and "untrue," or, at least, less "true." Thus, when "wit"
makes its comparisons, it finds some "casual and partial coin-
cidence which has nothing to do . . . with the nature of the
things."² It is this second distinctive power of "wit," that
of uniting ideas between which there is a customary incompati-
bility, which is the identifying characteristic of the "wit"
of the "metaphysical poets."

Their style was not so properly learned as metaphysical;
that is to say, whenever, by any violence done to their
ideas, they could make out an abstract likeness or possible
ground of comparison, they forced the image, whether
learned or vulgar, into the service of the Muses.³

Further,

The object of these writers was to match any one idea
with any other idea, for better or for worse, as we
say, and whether anything was gained by the change of
condition or not.⁴

¹Works, XX, 354. ²Ibid., VI, 19.
³Ibid., pp. 49-50. ⁴Ibid., p. 50.
Cowley's poetry, particularly, contains many examples of these unnatural metaphors. Cowley calls the rainbow "a species of heraldic painting," and he converts an "angel into a post-boy." "Though no two things can really be more unlike in all the associations belonging to them, than a leader of armies and a leader of the tuneful Nine," Hazlitt remarks, Cowley still must talk of "marching the Muse's Hannibal." And, finally, Hazlitt objects to Cowley's "the Phoenix Pindar is a vast species alone" on the grounds that Pindar was "not a species by himself," and therefore not really like a Phoenix in even one literal instance.

Pindar was not a species by himself, but only seemed so by pre-eminence or excellence; that is, from qualities of mind appealing to and absorbing the imagination, and which, therefore, ought to be represented in poetical language, by some other obvious and palpable image exhibiting the same kind or degree of excellence in other things.

The metaphors of the "metaphysical poets" are particularly reprehensible in Hazlitt's terms because they are purposeless; they achieve nothing, seeming to thwart the poet's intentions rather than to aid them. If these poets were attempting to produce comical or satirical effects by means of false, unnatural, or degrading imagery, such imagery could be justified in terms of the comic purpose. But on the contrary, the intentions of the "metaphysical poets" seem to be serious.

They neither belong to the class of lively or severe poetry. They have not the force of the one, nor the

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1Ibid., p. 58. 2Ibid. 3Ibid. 4Ibid.
gaiety of the other; but are an ill-assorted, unprofitable union of the two together, applying to serious subjects that quaint and partial style of allusion which fits only what is light and ludicrous, and building the most laboured conclusions on the most fantastic and slender premises.  

In "metaphysical poetry," we have neither the passion and feeling typical of tragedy, nor the near absence of feeling typical of comic or satirical poetry. Instead, we have feeling perversely disciplined into logic and intellectual abstractions. This channeling and consequent contortion of emotion into logical quibbles is psychologically false, and the picture of human nature as well as of external nature is, as a necessary result, a pointlessly erroneous one.

The object of the poetry of the passions again is to illustrate any strong feeling, by shewing the same feeling as connected with objects or circumstances more palpable and touching; but here the object was to strain and distort the immediate feeling into some barely possible consequence or recondite analogy, in which it required the utmost stretch of misapplied ingenuity to trace the smallest connection with the original impression.

"Imagination" is diverted from its proper course in the same fashion, and with similar results.

The imagination of the writers, instead of being conversant with the face of nature, or the secrets of the heart, was lost in the labyrinths of intellectual abstraction, or entangled in the technical quibbles and impertinent intricacies of language.

Donne's poetry provides Hazlitt with his chief examples of this misrepresentation of the human psyche. Donne is "more recondite in his logic and rigid in his descriptions" than Cowley. His poetry provides instances of "beautiful or

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1 Works, VI, 50.  2 Ibid.  3 Ibid.  4 Ibid., p. 51.
impassioned reflections losing themselves in obscure and difficult applications.\(^1\) "Donne's\(^7\) sentiments, profound and tender as they often are, are stifled in the expression; and 'heaved pantingly forth,' are 'buried quick again' under the ruins and rubbish of analytical distinctions.\(^2\) In the following passage, Hazlitt illustrates his meaning clearly.

Donne\(^7\) thus notices the circumstance of his wearing his late wife's hair about his arm, in a little poem which is called The Funeral.

"Whoever comes to shroud me, do not harm
Nor question much
That subtle wreath of hair, about mine arm;
The mystery, the sign you must not touch.

The scholastic reason he gives quite dissolves the charm of tender and touching grace in the sentiment itself--

"For 'tis my outward soul,
Viceroy to that, which unto heaven being gone,
Will leave this to control,
And keep these limbs, her provinces, from dissolution.\(^3\)

Finally, "metaphysical poetry" fails in effect. Since it is neither comic nor satirical it must be judged as though its aim were to produce a beauty and power capable of evoking sympathy as serious and impassioned poetry does. However, the subjects these poets chose for their poetry were neither "striking" nor "agreeable."\(^4\) Hazlitt even speaks of the "nauseousness" of Donne's descriptions.\(^5\) Since the comparisons or metaphors are built upon some "remote," "trifling," or "vague" circumstance,\(^6\) the effect is not only disagreeable,

\(^1\) Works, VI, 51. \(^2\) Ibid. \(^3\) Ibid., p. 52.
\(^4\) Ibid., p. 50. \(^5\) Ibid., p. 53. \(^6\) Ibid., p. 50.
but also bewildering and obscure: the reader is not enlightened, but instead puzzled or confounded.\textsuperscript{1} The self-centeredness of these poets takes away from the interest with which they might have endowed their poetry, for instead of attempting to fix their reader's sympathies upon objects of nature, they force the reader to focus his attention upon themselves.

They . . . made a point of twisting and torturing almost every subject they took in hand, till they had fitted it to the mould of their self-opinion and the previous fabrications of their own fancy, like those who pen acrostics in the shapes of pyramids, and cut out trees into the shapes of peacocks.\textsuperscript{2}

Apparently, therefore,

their chief aim is to make you wonder at the writer, not to interest you in the subject; and by an incessant craving after admiration, they have lost what they might have gained with less extravagance and affectation.\textsuperscript{3}

Hazlitt's discussion of "metaphysical" poets other than Cowley and Donne is restricted to brief characterizations in single paragraphs, and sometimes single sentences. These remarks, however, usually include some detail consistent with Hazlitt's general description of the "metaphysical" school. The poetry of Sir John Davies contains "repeated deviations from the faultless line of simplicity and nature."\textsuperscript{4} Hazlitt implies that Crashaw's "The water blushed into wine" is an inappropriate figure of speech,\textsuperscript{5} although he does not say why. Perhaps the associations of "blush" are too homely to keep company with miraculous occurrences. Davenant's

\textsuperscript{1}Works, VI, 50. \textsuperscript{2}Ibid., p. 51. \textsuperscript{3}Ibid. \textsuperscript{4}Ibid., p. 53. \textsuperscript{5}Ibid.
Gondibert is unnecessarily obscure: "The thoughts separately require so much attention to understand them, and arise so little out of the narrative, that they with difficulty sink into the mind."¹ Marvel's "affected and involved style" is of the same kind "here reprobated."²

Butler's "Hudibras"

Hazlitt judges Samuel Butler's Hudibras to be "the greatest single production of wit" in English literature.³ His analysis of Hudibras is both an explicit and a complete one, and as a result, the critical premises upon which he bases his judgment become quite clear.

Hudibras is superior to the works of the "metaphysical poets" because the purpose of the poem coincides with the purposes best suited to the faculty of "wit." Assuming the purpose of imaginative poetry, the "metaphysicals" had attempted to write what could only be an anomaly--serious witty poetry demanding a sympathetic audience response. They produced, of course, only a curious literary hybrid whose effect was negligible. Butler's purpose, on the other hand, was to evoke laughter, to point out the ridiculous in a startling, perhaps jarring manner, in order to deflate human pride and pomposity. Thus, although Butler's metaphors are built upon the same principle as those of the "metaphysical poets": in making comparisons, both strike out "some casual and partial

¹Works, VI, 53-54. ²Ibid., p. 54. ³Ibid., p. 62.
coincidence which has nothing to do ... with the nature of things,"\(^1\) Butler's comparisons are consciously ludicrous, and contain intentionally comic or satirical ingredients. This intention accords with the nature of "wit."

Wit ... consists in suggesting, or insinuating indirectly, an apparent coincidence between two things, to make the real incongruity, by the recoil of the imagination, more palpable than it could have been without this feigned and artificial approximation to an union between them. This makes the difference between jest and earnest which is essential to all wit.\(^2\)

Also integral to Butler's metaphors is the purpose of deflating or degrading a natural object. Although the metaphors of the "metaphysical poets" frequently degraded objects of nature, the metaphors of serious poetry ideally achieve just the opposite effect.

Wit, as distinguished from poetry, is the imagination or fancy inverted, and so applied to given objects, as to make the little look less, the mean more light and worthless; or to divert our admiration or wean our affections from that which is lofty and impressive, instead of producing a more intense admiration and exalted passion as poetry does.\(^3\)

The following comparison from Hudibras is a famous example of a comic and ludicrous comparison which takes all the poetical associations away from the dawn, or at least pretends to.

And, like a lobster boil'd, the morn
From black to red, began to turn ... \(^4\)

A similar figure which brings the heavens earthward in a comic fashion compares "the Bear turning round the pole-star to a bear tied to a stake."\(^5\) Of this image, Hazlitt says, "there

\(^1\) Works, VI, 19.  \(^2\) Ibid., XX, 358.  \(^3\) Ibid., VI, 15.

\(^4\) Ibid., p. 16.  \(^5\) Ibid., pp. 16-17.
cannot be a more witty, and at the same time degrading comparison.\textsuperscript{1} Or again, "\textit{Butler}\textsuperscript{7} makes you laugh or smile by comparing the high to the low, or pretending to raise the low to the lofty."\textsuperscript{2} The retinue of an Indian prince is no bigger than that of a thief on his way to the gallows.\textsuperscript{3} A bear with a ring in his nose is compared to the Indian king, likewise adorned.\textsuperscript{4}

Butler also attains good comic effects by utilising the power of "wit" to "decompose" ideas, resolving them into parts, or dissociating ideas from one another which have become habitually fixed in the mind in certain sets of association. It might be well to repeat here Hazlitt's characterization of both these functions of "wit."

If all our ideas were literal, physical, confined to a single impression of the object, there could be no faculty for, or possibility of, the existence of wit, for its first principle is the distinction between jest and earnest.\textsuperscript{5}

The faculty \textit{by which ideas are dissociated from one another}\textsuperscript{7} is the rapid, careless decomposition and re-composition of our ideas, by means of which we easily and clearly detach certain links in the chain of our associations from the place where they stand, and where they have an infirm footing, and join them on to others, to show how little intimacy they had with the former set.\textsuperscript{6}

Rhymes can be a species of this sort of wit, "where there is an alternate combination and resolution or decomposition of the elements of sound, contrary to our usual division and classification of them in ordinary speech."\textsuperscript{7} Butler's rhymes

\textsuperscript{1}Works, VI, 16. \textsuperscript{2}Ibid., p. 63. \textsuperscript{3}Ibid. \textsuperscript{4}Ibid. \textsuperscript{5}Ibid., XX, 359. \textsuperscript{6}Ibid., p. 362. \textsuperscript{7}Ibid., p. 21.
are witty in this sense, being "remote from what common custom would suggest." For example, the following end rhyme forces one to alter a common habit of speech.

That deals in destiny's dark counsels,
And sage opinions of the moon sells.

Puns are built on a similar principle: a word usually thought of as having one meaning connected with it, can equally well have two meanings at a time. Grammatical and racial meanings appear simultaneously in Butler's pun on "roots."

For Hebrew roots, although they're found
To flourish most on barren ground.

The foregoing are examples of what Hazlitt calls "verbal wit," in which the ridiculous effect rests upon devices connected with sight and sound. However, there is a higher, more purely intellectual kind of "wit" which rests on "the nature of things."

That wit is the most refined and effectual, which is founded on the detection of unexpected likeness or distinction in things, rather than in words. It is more severe and galling . . . though less surprising, in proportion as the thought suggested is more complete and satisfactory, from its being inherent in the nature of things.

Butler's poem contains examples of this kind of refined "wit."

Again, that master-stroke in Hudibras is sterling wit and profound satire, where speaking of certain religious hypocrites he says, that they

Compound for sins they are inclined to
By damning those they have no mind to;

but the wit consists in the truth of the character, and in the happy exposure of the ludicrous contradiction between

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1Ibid., p. 64. 2Ibid. 3Ibid. 4Ibid., p. 22.
the pretext and the practice, between their lenity towards their own vices, and their severity to those of others.¹

Hazlitt quotes another passage which contains witty distinctions between things. This time Butler points out that "there's nothing but a twinkling of a star" dividing society's heroes from its villains: only a fine distinction separates "a man of peace and war," "a huffing officer and slave," "a thief and justice."²

Butler's poem is the highest kind of poetry of "wit" because of its truth and universality. It is inspired by a "contempt for absurdity and hypocrisy,"³ faults eternally present in human nature. In spite of the poem's association with historical events and partisan interests, the stupidity and folly of the Puritans can be easily translated into the stupidity and folly of any self-righteous, self-satisfied group, in any historical time. He in general ridicules not persons, but things, not a party, but their principles, which may belong, as time and occasion serve, to one set of solemn pretenders or another. This he has done most effectually, in every possible way, and from every possible source, learned, or unlearned.⁴

Hazlitt feels that the court party itself could find its own faults mirrored in Hudibras.

Indeed, Butler hardly merited anything on the score of loyalty to the house of Stuart. True wit is not a parasite plant. The strokes which it aims at folly and knavery on one side of a question, tell equally home on

¹ Works, VI, 17-18. ² Ibid., p. 18. ³ Ibid., IX, 238. ⁴ Ibid., VI, 63.
the other. . . . A poem like Hudibras could not be made to order of a court. ¹

But even the greatest "poetry of wit" has defects arising from the intrinsic inferiority of the faculty to the poetic "imagination." These defects stem particularly from the necessarily unsympathetic quality of "wit"—the witty author usually being more interested in drawing attention to himself than to personalities and objects outside. The satirist almost necessarily throws his own personality into relief, always making clear his private notions and prejudices. At times, Butler even speaks in his own person.

In fact, Butler drives only at a set of obnoxious opinions, and runs into general declamations. His poem in its essence is a satire, or didactic poem. It is not virtually dramatic, or narrative, It is composed of digressions by the author. He instantly breaks off in the middle of a story, or incident, to comment upon and turn it into ridicule. ²

As a result of the prominence of the author's personality, the created characters become stunted: "He does not give characters but topics, which would do just as well in his own mouth without agents, or machinery of any kind." ³ The characters sometimes appear to be only "nicknames," "bugbears of popular prejudice," and are "unredeemed by any virtue, or difference or variety of disposition." ⁴ Butler lacks the sympathy to describe fully and consistently even the ludicrous eccentricities of others.

¹Works, VI, 62. ²Ibid., p. 65.
³Ibid. ⁴Ibid., p. 64.
There is no keeping in his characters, as in Don Quixote; nor any enjoyment . . . of their situations, as in Hogarth. Indeed it requires a considerable degree of sympathy to enter into and describe . . . even the ludicrous eccentricities of others, and there is no appearance of sympathy or liking to his subject in Butler.1

In Hazlitt's opinion, Butler not only has insufficient sympathy with his characters; the poet actually hates them. "It is something revolting to see an author persecute his characters, the cherished offspring of his brain, in this manner, without mercy."2

Finally, lack of sympathy, and an excess of disgust with his characters' faults has poisoned the poet's mind, and caused him to deface his poem with actual untruths. That this should be the case is consistent with Hazlitt's conception of "wit," but one cannot help feeling that Hazlitt seems to have lost some of his customary balance, and perhaps his sense of humor too in passages such as these:

The widow's7 sarcastic account of the passion of love, as consisting entirely in an attachment to land and houses, goods and chattels, which is enforced with all the rhetoric the author is master of, and hunted down through endless similes, is evidently false.3

He even makes out the rebels to be cowards and well-beaten, which does not accord with the history of the times. In an excess of zeal for church and state, he is too much disposed to treat religion as a cheat, and liberty as a farce.4

And, as the discussion in the introductory chapter on "wit" showed, an habitually witty mind eventually hardens the heart. This certainly seems to have been the case with Butler.

1Works, VI, 65. 2Ibid. 3Ibid., p. 66. 4Ibid.
The vulgarity and meanness of sentiment which Butler complains of in the Presbyterians, seems at last from long familiarity . . . to have tainted his own mind. Their worst vices appear to have taken root in his imagination. Nothing but what was selfish and groveling sunk into his memory, in the depression of a mental situation under his supposed hero.²

Pope

Hazlitt considers Pope to stand next in importance to Butler as a poet of "wit," and he cites Dr. Campbell's Philosophy of Rhetoric as an authority to support his opinion.² But while Hazlitt's discussion of Butler's Hudibras alone could give one a relatively complete and extremely concrete idea of his conception of "the poetry of wit," the same can hardly be said of Hazlitt's discussion of Pope. For Hazlitt does not analyze the literary products of Pope's "wit" so explicitly, and his treatment of Pope is somewhat less direct than his treatment of Butler.

Hazlitt first demonstrates that Pope's poetry cannot be classified as "poetry of imagination." For in Hazlitt's opinion, Pope is too essentially dispassionate, too lacking in sympathy to be considered a poet of nature or "imagination." Since Pope's knowledge of things was necessarily limited "to all that he himself loved or hated," the objects of Pope's poetry suffer a like limitation: he seldom chooses an object

¹Works, VI, 66.
²Ibid., p. 62. Although Hazlitt also says that Pope and Dryden are "the great masters of the artificial style of poetry in our language . . . as Chaucer, Spenser, Shakespeare, and Milton were of the natural. Works, V, 68.
³Ibid., V, 70.
for a poem which inspires spontaneous admiration in all men, but more generally chooses objects primarily interesting to himself. This is the first result of Pope's lack of sympathy. "He preferred the artificial in external objects because he had a stronger fellow-feeling with the self-love of the maker or the proprietor of the gew gaw, then admiration of that which was interesting to all mankind."¹ Pope cannot deal with real human passion, being limited instead to portraying feelings or modifications of feeling which are extremely general and conventional ones.

He preferred the artificial to the natural in passion, because the involuntary and uncalculating impulses of the one hurried him away with a force and vehemence with which he could not grapple; while he could trifle with the conventional . . . modifications of mere sentiment at will.²

Hazlitt's meaning here can be clarified by his comment on the artificiality of Millamant's "passion" in Congreve's *The Way of the World*. "The springs of nature, passion, or imagination are but feebly touched."³ "Millamant is nothing but a fine lady; and all her airs and affectation would be blown away with the first breath of misfortune."⁴

The effect of Pope's poetry is as different from that of the "poetry of the imagination" as its objects are inappropriate to imaginative literature. Hazlitt's judgment here seems to derive from his conception of the imaginative sublime. Since the objects of Pope's poetry are petty, or he treats

them as if they were so, the effect of the poetry is correspondingly trivial. Awe, wonder, and fear are not replaced by their opposites on the scale of emotion in Pope's poetry, as they obviously are in Butler's, but by something in between. Hazlitt discusses the contrast in effect of a sublime object with that of a Popean one at greatest length in his essay, "Pope, Lord Byron, and Mr. Bowles." Here, Hazlitt asks his readers to compare their responses to Chaucer's Custance "floating in her boat on the wide sea," with their responses to Pope's Belinda "launched on the bosom of the silver Thames;" or contrast their feelings concerning Griselda's loss of her children, with those they have concerning Belinda's loss of her favourite curl. The Popean object can not produce a strong emotional response, because it is always artificial and unreal. Hazlitt evokes the quality of Pope's "poetry of wit" most effectively in figurative language.

In his smooth and polished verse we meet with no prodigies of nature, but with miracles of wit; the thunders of his pen are whispered flatteries; its forked lightnings pointed sarcasms . . . for rocks, and seas, and mountains, artificial grass-plats, gravel-walks, and tinkling rills; for earthquakes and tempests, the breaking of a flower pot, or the fall of a china jar.

But it still remains to speak of the qualities of Pope's poetry which identify him as a poet of "wit" more positively. His lack of sympathy with universally affecting objects, or his indifference to human passions could be a characteristic of any of the four classifications of poetry.
following the decline of the "poetry of imagination." And Pope's poetry does have qualities other than the brittleness of effect which has been hinted at, which are distinctively witty.

As has been pointed out before, one of the "favorite employments of wit" is "to add littleness to littleness."\(^1\) Pope delights, particularly in his satires, "in representing things\(^2\) in the most contemptible and insignificant point of view." Hazlitt refers to Pope's ability to reduce objects:

\[
\text{It cannot be denied, that his chief excellence lay more in diminishing, than in aggrandizing objects; in checking, not in encouraging our enthusiasm; in sneering at the extravagances of fancy or passion, instead of giving a loose to them; in describing a row of pins and needles, rather than the embattled speers of Greeks and Trojans; in penning a lampoon or a compliment.}\(^3\)
\]

Hazlitt explains how Pope achieves the diminution of an idea in the poet's lines,

\[
\text{Now night descending, the proud scene is o'er}
\]
\[
\text{But lives in Settles numbers one day more.}
\]

This is certainly as mortifying an inversion of the idea of poetical immortality as could be thought of; it fixes the maximum of littleness and insignificance: but it is not by likeness to anything else that it does this, but by literally taking the lowest possible duration of ephemeral reputation, marking it . . . on the scale of endless renown, and giving a rival credit for it as his loftiest praise.\(^4\)

Pope's ability to clothe the little with "mock dignity" in his poems of "fancy," such as *The Rape of the Lock*, seems comparable to Butler's method of achieving comic effects by

\[\text{\textsuperscript{1}Works, VI, 15. \textsuperscript{2}Ibid., V, 69.}\]
\[\text{\textsuperscript{3}Ibid., V, 71. \textsuperscript{4}Ibid., VI, 18.}\]
by means of his juxtaposition of the high with the low. Only the mental process of comparison is similar, however, for the meaning of "low" in Butler and in Pope is quite different. Butler's "low" refers to grotesque and vulgar objects, like lobsters boiling, and bears chained to stakes. The "little" things which Pope clothes with mock dignity, on the other hand, are refined and beautiful, although the beauty is an artificial one, and quite an insignificant "beauty" in the over-all scheme of things. It is thus that *The Rape of the Lock* is the "double refined essence of wit and fancy,"\(^1\) for "fancy" can perceive and reproduce just this type of artificial beauty.\(^2\)

The *Essay on Criticism* is the double-refined essence of wit and sense.\(^3\) Pope's critical essays in general could be classified as "the wit of sense and observation, which consists in the acute illustration of good sense and practical wisdom, by means of some far-fetched conceit or quaint imagery."\(^4\)

As was mentioned before, moral aphorisms may sparkle with "wit" in their mode of expression. Hazlitt quotes from Pope one example of sensible matter in the form of "wit"--

\(^1\) *Works*, V, 73.  
\(^2\) Perhaps it should be recalled here that in Hazlitt's writings, "fancy" appears in a variety of contexts and meanings. The primary function of the faculty would seem to be the perception of sensuous beauty. But these perceptions of "fancy" can be used to adorn either tragic or comic poetry and interfere with the spirit of neither. Therefore the effects of "fancy" really depend ultimately upon the context in which they appear.  
\(^3\) *Works*, V, 72.  
Tis with our judgments as our watches, none
Goes just alike, yet each believes his own.¹

Gay

One of Hazlitt's most fundamental beliefs is that the "wit" of the comic is capable of producing a distinctly moral effect upon mankind. Hazlitt does not emphasize this point in connection with either Butler or Pope, but he makes it the center of his remarks on Gay. In analyzing the Beggar's Opera, he says that the work is "a masterpiece of wit and genius, not to say of morality."² This moral effect is achieved primarily through the capacity of "wit" to "resolve aggregates or bundles of things into their component parts,"³ a process which results, in the particular case of the Beggar's Opera, in teaching the audience what they truly are, by dispelling hardened prejudice, and penetrating through "the disguise or crust with which indolence and custom 'skin and slur over' our ideas."⁴ The aristocrat discovers that rank does not exempt him from the vice and folly of the human race, for he is made to perceive his close kinship with his "brother" highwaymen and thieves. "Wit" achieves its effect by comparison.

The scenes, characters, and incidents are, in themselves, of the lowest and most disgusting kind: but, by the sentiments and reflections which are put into the mouths of highwaymen, turnkeys, their mistresses, wives, or daughters, he has converted this motley group into a set of fine gentlemen and ladies, satirists and philosophers.⁵

The response of the audience to the comparison is what it should

¹Works, VI, 24. ²Ibid., V, 107. ³Ibid., XX, 356. ⁴Ibid. ⁵Ibid., V, 107.
The very wit . . . takes off from the offensiveness of the satire; and I have seen great statesmen . . . laughing most immoderately at the compliments paid to them as not much worse than pickpockets and cut-throats in a different line of life, and pleased, as it were, to see themselves humanised by some sort of fellowship with their kind.1

Gay forces his audience to connect ideas with both classes contrary to their habitual ones, and by dissolving associational clusters, casts "a glancing and fortuitous light upon the whole."2 The end result of the Beggar's Opera is that vice is shown for what it is in itself—as the same whatever the circumstances surrounding it may be, whether they be those of a palace or a jail. The audience is disciplined through their knowledge of this truth.

Indeed, it may be said that the moral of the piece is to shew the vulgarity of vice; or that the same violations of integrity and decorum, the same habitual sophistry in palliating their want of principle, are common to the great and the powerful, with the meanest and most contemptible of the species.3

Clearly, the effect of the work is delight as well as instruction, although Hazlitt does not analyze passages which produce comic or otherwise pleasing effects. But the work is adorned with "all the graces, the precision, and brilliancy of style."4 "Every line in this sterling comedy sparkles with wit."5 It is certainly a tribute to Gay's mastery of the comic and satiric art, that those who were the

1Works, V, 108. 2Ibid., XX, 356.
3Ibid., V, 108. 4Ibid., p. 107. 5Ibid., p. 108.
objects of his satire could be seen to laugh "most immoderately" at the "compliments" paid them. One reason for the perpetually delightful quality of Gay's "wit" may be that unlike Butler's, Gay's mind never became poisoned by contempt.

If good sense has been made the characteristic of Pope, good-nature might be made . . . the characteristic of GAY. He was a satirist without gall. He had a delightful placid vein of invention, fancy, wit, humour, description, ease and elegance. His Beggars Opera indeed has stings in it, but it appears to have left the writer's mind without any.

Swift

Swift, like Gay, is in "the first [class] of agreeable moralists in verse." However, it is not Swift's verse which most attracts Hazlitt's attention, but instead his prose, and particularly the prose of Gulliver's Travels, of which "the moral lesson is as fine as the intellectual exhibition is amusing.""[Swift] has torn the scales from off his moral vision:"[What presumption, and what malice prepense, to show men what they are, and teach them what they ought to be!"

It is, indeed, the way with our quacks in morality to preach up the dignity of human nature, to pamper pride and hypocrisy with the idle mockeries of the virtues they pretend to, and which they have not: but it was not Swift's way to cant morality, or anything else; nor did his genius prompt him to write unmeaning panegyrics on mankind!

Hazlitt's analysis of the processes of "wit" which enabled Swift to be so profound a moral teacher is a brilliant

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1Works, V, 108.  2Ibid., IX, 239-40.  3Ibid., V, 109.
4Ibid., p. 111.  5Ibid., p. 110.  6Ibid., p. 111.
7Ibid.
one, I think. Swift achieves his purpose mainly through utilising the power of "wit" to dissociate the ideas from one another which have become fixed in certain sets of association. Swift has "sifted" the pretensions of human life "from the alloy of circumstances,"¹ and leaves to them only "the abstract predicament of size."²

His object was to strip empty pride and grandeur of the imposing air which external circumstances throw around them; and for this purpose he has cheated the imagination of the illusions which the prejudices of sense and of the world put upon it, by reducing everything to the abstract predicament of size. He enlarges or diminishes the scale, as he wishes to shew the insignificance or the grossness of our overweening self-love.³ ... /He has done so/ with mathematical precision.³

This process of sifting out pretensions illustrates the propensity of "wit" to reduce rather than to aggrandize objects of experience, and it certainly necessitates a suspension of sympathy.

Hazlitt makes no attempt to analyze the effects of particular passages in Swift. The generalization which he offers on the effect of Swift's style is too vague to be particularly satisfactory. "Honest abruptness" does not seem to me, at least, to mean much.

The ludicrous in Swift arises out of his keen sense of impropriety, his soreness and impatience with the least absurdity. He separates, with a severe and caustic air, truth from falsehood, folly from wisdom ... and it is the force, the precision, and the honest abruptness with which the separation is made, that excites our surprise, our admiration and laughter.⁴

¹Works, V, 111. ²Ibid., p. 110.
³Ibid. ⁴Ibid., p. 112.
Minor Contributions to the Poetry of Wit

Dryden belongs with the poets of "wit," at least to the extent that he wrote satires. Hazlitt's criticism of Dryden is a relatively lame one, however, and there is little concerning Dryden's satirical poems which adds to a discussion of Hazlitt's conception of witty poetry. Interestingly enough, however, Hazlitt says of Absalom and Achitophel that it "is superior, both in force of invective and discrimination of character, to anything of Pope's in the same way."\(^1\) Hazlitt criticizes the Annus Mirabilis as a "tedious performance,"\(^2\) "witty" in the sense that "metaphysical poetry" is so. "It is a tissue ... of lumbering conceits ... in the worst style of what has been denominated metaphysical poetry."\(^3\)

In addition to "metaphysical poetry" and satirical poetry, the "poetry of wit" has one more variety which might be called the "poetry of gay irresponsibility." Suckling is perhaps the founder of the tradition. His compositions are "almost all of them short and lively effusions of wit and gallantry." "He has fancy, wit, humour, descriptive talent, the highest elegance, perfect ease."\(^5\) Hazlitt considers him an attractive minor poet whose genius "was confined entirely to the light and agreeable."\(^6\) Rochester is somewhat more serious, but still belongs to this tradition by virtue of his "extravagant heedless levity."\(^7\) He is a "first rate wit"\(^8\) whose verses

\(^1\) Works, V, 80. \(^2\) Ibid., p. 81. \(^3\) Ibid.
\(^4\) Ibid., VI, 55. \(^5\) Ibid., IX, 237. \(^6\) Ibid.
\(^7\) Ibid., V, 83. \(^8\) Ibid., IX, 237.
"cut and sparkle like diamonds." But he combines thought with licentiousness, and Hazlitt praises him for his "keen and caustic" satire. Finally, the spirit of the Restoration is carried into later times by Prior and Gay.

Prior and Gay belong, in the characteristic excellences of their style, to the same class of writers with Suckling, Rochester, and Sedley: the former imbibed most of the licentious levity of the age of Charles II. and carried it beyond the Revolution under King William. Prior is "not a very moral poet," but he is a "polished wit, full of the delicacies of style amidst gross allusions."

In his lyrical and fugitive pieces he has shown even more genius, more playfulness, more mischievous gaiety. No one has exceeded him in the laughing grace with which he glances at a subject that will not bear examining, with which he gently hints at what cannot be directly insisted on, with which he half conceals, and half draws aside the veil from the Muses' nicest mysteries.

It is more difficult to connect "playful wit" of this sort with Hazlitt's general conception of the faculty than it is to relate to it either the "wit" of the "metaphysicals" or of the satirists. The reason is that Hazlitt makes no attempt to analyze its poetry. He says nothing of these writers' imagery, of the nature of their comparisons between objects, or of the purely verbal devices employed which might connect their work with the method of "wit."

And since Hazlitt does not characterize the content of these poets' work adequately, there is no definition of the relation of this kind of poetry to nature. It would seem, from Hazlitt's comments, that the poetry of this group is characterized.

1 Works, IX, 237. 2 Ibid. 3 Ibid., V, 106.
4 Ibid., IX, 239. 5 Ibid., V, 106.
mainly by a sharp brilliance of style, but by none of the defining intellectual qualities of "wit," such as are manifested in parts by a witty conceit; in wholes by an organizing witty conception. Genuinely "witty" is these poets' indifference, and their minimization of the importance of things.

Lord Byron and the Poetry of Wit

Although Lord Byron's poetry as a whole belongs to another historical period, I believe Hazlitt's criticism of Byron's satirical poetry belongs in the present chapter rather than in a later one. At any rate, it is Hazlitt's conception of "wit" which can at least partially explain his negative criticism of Byron's satires; and although Byron's perversion of "the poetry of wit" could be treated as an aspect of a tendency common to the poets of "paradox" to reverse all standard literary procedures, still, the consistency, and the systematic nature of Hazlitt's thought may appear to better advantage if the criticism of the satires is included here.

As has been pointed out in the introduction, Hazlitt considers different kinds of "wit" to be different in value: The best "wit" always has a firm foundation in that which is accepted to be true. Truth must reside in the thing satirized.

A flippant jest is a good test of truth. .. Ridicule is necessarily built on certain supposed facts, whether true or false, and on their inconsistency with certain acknowledged maxims, whether right or wrong. It is,
therefore, a fair test, if not of philosophical or abstract truth, at least of what is truth according to public opinion and common sense; for it can only expose to instantaneous contempt that which is condemned by public opinion, and is hostile to the common sense of mankind.  

The products of "wit" are also judged according to the value of the effect they achieve. Successful "wit" usually results in laughter or surprise; and the superior productions of "wit" usually have a moral effect. The great witty poet almost always points out the real follies and absurdities of mankind, and by doing so exerts a corrective influence upon his readers.

Hazlitt criticizes English Bards and Scotch Reviewers on the grounds that in this poem, truth does not reside in the thing satirized.

His 'English Bards and Scotch Reviewers' is dogmatical and insolent, but without refinement or point. He calls people names, and tries to transfix a character with an epithet, which does not stick, because it has no other foundation than his own petulance and spite.

Since the degrading allusions of the poets are either untrue, or irrelevant to the object of satire, the poet succeeds only in degrading himself. If Wordsworth's poetry is Byron's "aversion," for all the reader can tell it must be Byron's fault, for no actual defect of Wordsworth's work is pointed out. Hazlitt also feels that by not focusing on intrinsic failings, but upon "external circumstances," the poet likewise achieves only the result of putting himself in a bad

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1Works, VI, 20. 2Ibid., XI, 74. 3Ibid.
light. Byron's snobbishness is revealed, for example, by attacks such as the following:

The Noble Author says of a celebrated barrister and critic, that he was 'born in a garret sixteen stories high.' The insinuation is not true; or if it were, it is low. The allusion degrades the person who makes it, not him to whom it is applied.  

Don Juan succeeds as a serious poem, in Hazlitt's opinion, but fails as a satire. The comic effect does not arise from the incongruity of the metaphors, or from other kinds of witty devices, but from an incongruity in the tone of the poem itself. "You laugh and are surprised that any one should turn round and travestie himself; the drollery is in the utter discontinuity of ideas and feelings." Poetic and witty effects cancel one another out in this process. Certainly, any kind of moral effect is extinguished, since satire cancels the sympathy aroused by the serious passages, and Byron makes "virtue serve as a foil to vice" in the comic ones.

Our enthusiasm for genius or virtue is thus turned into a jest by the very person who has kindled it, and who thus fatally quenches the sparks of both. It is not that Lord Byron is sometimes serious and sometimes trifling, sometimes profligate, and sometimes moral—but when he is most serious and most moral, he is only preparing to mortify the unsuspecting reader by putting a pitiful hoax upon him.

Conclusion

The results of this chapter seem to me to be fairly clear. Hazlitt has a conception of the "poetry of wit" which

1Works, XI, 74.  2Ibid., p. 75.  3Ibid., p. 75.  4Ibid.
corresponds to, and derives from his conception of the faculty itself. Therefore, even the greatest "poetry of wit" is intrinsically inferior to the "poetry of imagination" for the same reasons that "wit" as a faculty is inferior to the "imagination." Hazlitt's criticism of Hudibras, which he judges to be one of the greatest of all productions of "wit," bears out the truth of this statement. Since the mental habit of "wit" precludes sympathy, and thus finally hardens the heart, the poet is removed from truth and morality in a way that no poet of the "imagination" is. Butler gave a distorted view of the passion of love, and he comes eventually to treat "religion as a cheat, liberty as a farce." And Butler's contempt for the Presbyterians became so great, that he not only represented his characters incompletely, but inaccurately in terms of known historical fact.

We also find that there are levels of value within the "poetry of wit." The greatest products of the faculty are the satires, based upon "truth according to public opinion and common sense." The effect of the satires is a moral one, for human beings need to be made aware of their failings—vanity and pride must be deflated. Next in value to the products of satiric "wit" are those of the purely playful "wit" whose effect is sheer delight. And finally, of course, there are the self-defeating "metaphysical poets" whose works have almost no effect at all. Hazlitt's criticism of Lord Byron's poems indicates that he held these premises consistently; for Byron's poems are not based upon truth, and their effect is neither truly comic, delightful, or moral.
CHAPTER V

THE POETRY OF COMMONPLACES

In all Hazlitt's criticism of the "poetry of commonplaces" his point of reference and standard of comparison is Shakespeare's poetry of the "sympathetic imagination." The reason for this is probably that, with minor exceptions, the works identified by Hazlitt as "poetry of the commonplace" are examples of dramatic tragedy—the genre, in Hazlitt's criticism, whose purpose and effect is defined by Shakespeare's practice.

The psychological faculty which Hazlitt invariably connects with the "poetry of commonplaces" is "reason." And "reason" by nature is incapable of producing the content and effect of the ideal tragedy—a representation of human nature so individual and concrete, so complete and so affecting that it necessarily moves the audience to strong, spontaneous sympathy. For "reason" strips natural objects of the "colors and shapes of fancy," leaving dull matter-of-fact; and instead of being directed toward the particular object in nature, "reason" concerns itself with the general qualities of a species. Although Hazlitt does not state a cause-and-effect relationship directly, he does connect the general, "abstract"

\[1\text{Works, V, 8.}\]
view of nature with a representation of it which can only be commonplace; that is, one which only repeats truths already accepted and cherished by tradition.

The reasonable, purely conventional mind cannot respond correctly to great imaginative literature. Dr. Johnson, whose mind, in Hazlitt's opinion, tends in the direction of the conventional and commonplace, is unqualified even to judge powerful imaginative poetry such as Shakespeare's. Therefore Hazlitt's analysis of the literary limitations of Dr. Johnson's mind provides an interesting introduction to the criticism of the "poetry of commonplaces."

Dr. Johnson, whose "general powers of reasoning overlaid his critical susceptibility"\(^1\) could neither perceive nor produce more than general, accepted truths. Johnson is a "didactic reasoner" whose province is to take cognizance of those results of human nature which are constantly repeated and always the same, which follow one another in regular succession, which are acted upon by large classes of men, and embodied in received customs, laws, language, and institutions; and it was in arranging, comparing, and arguing on these kind of general results, that Johnson's excellence lay. But he could not quit his hold on the common-place and mechanical, and apply the general rule to the particular exception, or shew how the nature of man was modified by the workings of passion, or the infinite fluctuations of thought and accident.\(^2\)

Because "reason" is the dominant characteristic of Dr. Johnson's mind, he is simply unable to comprehend the dramatic art of Shakespeare, inspired by the "sympathetic imagination."

All Johnson's ideas were cast in a given mould, in a set form: they were made out by rule and system, by

\(^1\)Works, IV, 175.  \(^2\)Ibid.
climax, inference, and antithesis:--Shakespeare's were the reverse. Johnson's understanding dealt only in round numbers: the fractions were lost upon him.¹

When Johnson "judges" human character, he does so only with the eye of "reason," and his vision is therefore limited to a perception of "the average forms of things;"² he can see "classes" but not "degrees."³ Thus, Dr. Johnson does not even know that Shakespeare created human personalities with as unique existences as they have in nature. Otherwise, he would not have said of the characters in Shakespeare's plays that "each . . . is a species, instead of being an individual."⁴

Dr. Johnson in fact found the general species of didactic form in Shakespeare's characters, which was all he sought or cared for; he did not find the individual traits or the dramatic distinctions which Shakespeare has engrafted on this general nature, because he felt no interest in them.⁵

The same holds true in Johnson's blindness to the concrete representation of natural objects. In Johnson's mind, certain general descriptive terms are associated by convention with certain corresponding objects. According to Dr. Johnson, "a mountain is sublime, or a rose is beautiful; for that their name and definition imply."⁶ But to seek only for such a conventional representation of nature in Shakespearean tragedy must simply "lower Shakespeare's genius to the standard of commonplace invention."⁷ Finally, says Hazlitt, Dr. Johnson would make criticism "a kind of Procrustes' bed of genius,"⁸

¹Works, IV, 175. ²Ibid. ³Ibid. ⁴Ibid., p. 176. ⁵Ibid. ⁶Ibid. ⁷Ibid., p. 177. ⁸Ibid., p. 176.
where he could reduce imagination to matter-of-fact, "regulate the passions according to reason, and translate the whole into logical diagrams and rhetorical declamation."¹ The tragedy of mere "commonplaces" is just such a "Procrustes' bed."

**Tragedy: French Classicism**

The "poetry of commonplaces" occupies an important place in Hazlitt's outline of the history of tragedy, for from classical to modern times, there have been only four main tragic modes, of which the tragedy of "commonplaces" is the third. The first type is the classical Greek; the second, the romantic Elizabethan tragedy of "imagination"; the fourth and modern style is the German tragedy of paradoxes.² But the third sort of tragedy is "the French or commonplace rhetorical style, which is founded on the antique as to its form and subject matter."³ It is not surprising that Hazlitt gives his fullest definition of his conception of the tragedy of commonplaces in his various comments on seventeenth century French tragedy, and the tragedy subsequently inspired by it.

Although Hazlitt does not discuss the psychological character of individual French tragic writers, he does discuss


³*Ibid.*. I do not believe Rene Wellek is justified in identifying the third species of tragedy as "bourgeois tragedy." (Wellek, II, 209.) Hazlitt states that the tragedie bourgeoise is a variety of the "school of Shakespeare" and therefore the antithesis of the classical form. (*Works*, VI, 347.)
that of the French nation. First of all, the self-centeredness and vanity typical of the French prevents them from being an imaginative people.

As to imagination, it must be allowed that they are woefully at a loss in this respect. The French, taken as a nation, have no idea of anything but what is French. They are too well pleased with themselves to be at the trouble of going out of themselves. Vanity and imagination are two incompatible qualities.

Hazlitt does not use the word "reason" to identify the faculty which inspires French poetry, but he does use the word "abstraction," a word which expresses what Hazlitt conceives to be the result of reasonable activity—a result opposed to the activity of the "imagination." "In a word," says Hazlitt, "the French are not a people of imagination." Instead, they are

the creatures either of sensation or abstraction. The images of things, when the objects are no longer present, throw off all their complexity and distinctions, and are lost in the general class, or name; so that the words, charming, delicious, superb, etc., convey just the same meaning, and excite just the same emotion in the mind of a Frenchman, as the most vivid description of real objects . . . could do. Hence their poetry is the poetry of abstraction.

Because the French cannot sympathise with anything outside themselves, and because their consuming concern with the general instead of the particular, "French poetry is therefore essentially conventional and commonplace."

It rejects every thing that is not cast in a given mould—that is not stamped by custom—that is not sanctioned by authority;—every thing that is not French. The French,

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1Works, XVII, 338. 2Ibid., XVI, 89.
3Ibid., pp. 89-90. 4Ibid., p. 89.
indeed, can conceive of nothing that is not French. There is something which prevents them from entering into any views which do not perfectly fall in with their habitual prejudices. ¹

French tragedy reflects the quality of the French mind, for it is abstract and general in every aspect. "We never get beyond conjecture and reasoning—beyond the general impression of the situation of the persons—beyond general . . . descriptions of objects."² French translations of Shakespeare are particularly revealing, for in them, the translators "uniformly leave out all the poetry, or what we consider as such."³ To "leave out all the poetry" is to leave out the concrete: "They generalize the passion, the character, the thoughts, the images, everything;—they reduce it to a common topic. It is then perfect—for it is French."⁴

But poetic truth is concrete. "Moral and poetical truth is like expression in a picture—the one is not to be attained by smearing over a large canvas, nor the other by bestriding a vague topic."⁵ Thus, tragedy which is abstract rather than concrete, general rather than particular, must necessarily be inferior simply because of its inferiority in truth to nature. The "chef-d'œuvres" of the French stage are "at best, only ingenious paraphrases of nature."⁶ "There is scarcely a single page of their tragedy which fairly throws nature open to you. It is tragedy in masquerade."⁷

¹Works, XVI, 89. ²Ibid., VI, 354. ³Ibid., XVI, 90. ⁴Ibid. ⁵Ibid., XII, 55. ⁶Ibid., VI, 354. ⁷Ibid.
But equally, if not more important, because the ideal effect of tragedy is the cultivation of strong sympathy in others, a concrete, and therefore truthful representation of human nature is above all to be desired. Shakespeare achieved such concrete representation through his ability to identify his feelings and thoughts with the thoughts and feelings of others. The results of this identification, as we have already seen in the chapter on the "poetry of imagination," were concretely realized individuals who appeared to have an organic, dynamic life of their own. The conciseness with which many truths of character are simultaneously revealed forces the reader to fill out the suggested nuances and relations himself, so that the intensity of the reader's perception of truth almost equals the intensity with which the truth is revealed. The presentation of character in French tragedy is the opposite of all this.

Since the French dramatist does not have the ability to project his mind into the minds of others, he cannot depict the thoughts and feelings of others, and is therefore compelled merely to depict his own. "The true poet identifies the reader with the characters he represents; the French poet only identifies him with himself." And far from revealing the truths of character concisely so that some things are revealed through suggestion, the French poets over-explain everything: They describe the passions rather than allow the characters to reveal their feelings dramatically; and these

\[1\textit{Works}, \textit{XVI}, 90.\]
descriptions of the passions are "the most laboured, overt and explicit possible. Nothing is left to be understood."\(^1\) The true poet "transports you to the scene" so that "you catch, from the lips of the persons concerned, what lies nearest to their hearts."\(^2\) The French poet, on the other hand, "takes you into his closet, and reads you a lecture upon it."\(^3\)

Much of Hazlitt's criticism of the rhetorical tragedy of commonplaces is centered about his criticism of dialogue. The critical comments he makes continue the comment upon lack of truth to nature and concreteness of representation of character, and have little or nothing to do with imagery and diction. The contrast with Shakespearean dialogue is manifest. When Shakespeare's characters speak, they seem to do so "without any appearance of preparation or premeditation,"\(^4\) as people in life would speak in the same situation. But the speeches in French tragedy give only the impression of studied artificiality. They do not seem to say what a person would be compelled to say under the force of passion, but what an author might say after having reasoned on the subject.

It has often been remarked, that, in French tragedy, the poet is always too easily seen through the discourses of the different personages; that he communicates to them his own presence of mind; his cool reflection of the situation. . . . When we accurately examine the most of their tragical speeches, we shall find that they are seldom such as would be delivered by persons, speaking or acting by

\(^1\)Works, XVI, 89.  \(^2\)Ibid., VI, 354.  \(^3\)Ibid.  
\(^4\)Ibid., V, 50.
themselves without any restraint. 1

The dialogue is a tissue of commonplaces, of laboured declamations on human life, of learned casuistry on the passions, on virtue and vice, which any one else might make just as well as the person speaking; and yet, what the persons themselves would say, is all we want to know, and all for which the poet puts them into those situations. 2

French tragedy, therefore, does not reveal individual nature, real passion or imagination growing out of real passion and the circumstances of the speaker. Instead, there are merely dissertations on the passions, which are themselves far removed from truth because of their vagueness and generality.

Instead of individual nature . . . [French tragedy] deals only in vague, imposing, and laboured declamations, or descriptions of nature, dissertations on the passions, and pompous flourishes which never entered any head but the author's, have no existence in the nature which they pretend to identify, and are not dramatic at all, but purely didactic. 3

The reader of French classical tragedy, then, simply does not come to know vividly intense passion from any source, or in any form. The passions are neither represented nor described concretely. And therefore, French tragedy must fail to achieve the tragic effect, for sympathy depends upon intimate knowledge, in Hazlitt's view.

If we are imbued with a deep sense of individual weal or woe, we shall be awe-struck at the idea of humanity in general. If we know little of it but its abstract and common properties, without their particular application, their force or degrees, we shall care just as little as we know either about the whole or the individuals. 4

1Works, XVI, 85. 2Ibid., 90. 3Ibid., VI, 347. 4Ibid., XII, 55.
Hazlitt does not deal with the failure in effect of French tragedy at any length, but he does mention it. In one place, he says: "Whenever the tragic hero is able to express his pain in antitheses and ingenious allusions, we may safely dispense with our pity." And in another, he compares the effect of the death of the tragic hero in Shakespeare's *Othello* with that in Voltaire's *Zaire*.

When Othello kills himself, after that noble characteristic speech at the end, in which he makes us feel all that passes in his soul, and runs over the objects and events of his whole life, the blow strikes not only at him but at us: when Oroson in Zaire, after a speech which Voltaire has copied after the English poet, does the same thing, he falls--like a commonplace personified.  

**Tragedy: English Classicism**

Hazlitt never develops his analysis of the nature of the "tragedy of mere commonplaces" further than his analysis of the French classical school. In his discussion of English adaptations of the French style, his emphasis remains on the dialogue--on those vague, pompous, formally arranged declamations reflecting the poet rather than the character who speaks the lines. Hazlitt continues to mention conventional, commonplace imagery and thought, although without concrete examples to prove his point. But if Hazlitt offers little in the way of extended analysis, the tenacity and consistency with which he held to the idea of the tragedy of "commonplaces" is noteworthy and important.

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It would seem that the "poetry of commonplaces" made its first appearance in the eighteenth century, since it follows the "poetry of wit" in Hazlitt's historical scheme of English literary history. In practice, Hazlitt dates its appearance earlier.

After the Restoration, that is, after the return of the exiled . . . Stuarts from France, our writers transplanted this artificial, monotonous, and imposing common-place style into England, by imitations and translations, where it could not be expected to take deep root, and produce wholesome fruits, and where it has indeed given rise to little but turgidity and rant in men of original force of genius, and to insipidity and formality in feeble copyists.1

Dryden receives the fullest treatment of any of the English writers in the tradition of French classical tragedy: Dryden has the psychological make-up attributed to the French, a mind dominated by "reason" accompanied by an inability to sympathise with others strongly. "Dryden never goes out of himself: he is a man of strong sense and powerful feeling, reasoning upon what he should feel in certain situations."2 "Dryden's plays are better than Pope could have written; for though he does not go out of himself by the force of the imagination, he goes out of himself by the force of common-places and rhetorical dialogue."3 (This latter quotation comes from Hazlitt's essay "On Dryden and Pope," which is consistently fairer to the poet than his essay "On Ancient and Modern Literature," the source of the former, where his particular concern is to condemn French tragedy.)

1Works, VI, 354. 2Ibid., V, 191. 3Ibid., pp. 81-82.
Hazlitt's characterization of Dryden's plays fits in well with his general description of French tragedy. In a review of a dramatic production based upon a mixture of Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra* and Dryden's *All for Love*, Hazlitt points out Dryden's inferiority to Shakespeare as a tragic writer. Dryden expresses himself only in studied declamation, in general topics, expanding and varying the stock of his own ideas, so as to produce a tolerable resemblance to those of mankind in different situations, and building up, by the aid of logic and rhetoric--that is, by means of certain truths and images, generally known and easily applied, a stately and impressive poem. Whereas Shakespeare does not suppose himself to be others, but at once becomes them... His imagination passes out of himself into them, and as it were, transmits to him their feelings and circumstances.¹

In a more disagreeable frame of mind, Hazlitt describes Dryden's plays as "perhaps the fairest specimen" of "the vicious manner of the age"²--that is, the manner inspired by French tragedy.

I do not know how to describe this manner better than by saying that it is one continued and exaggerated commonplace. All the characters are put into a swaggering attitude of dignity, and tricked out in the pomp of ostentatious drapery. The images are extravagant, yet not far-fetched; they are outrageous caricatures of obvious thoughts: the language oscillates between bombast and bathos: the characters are noisy pretenders to virtue, and shallow boasters in vice.³

Other seventeenth century writers of tragedy whom Hazlitt classifies as poets of the "commonplace" are Lee, Otway, and Congreve. Hazlitt only says just enough concerning these writers to identify them as writers in the "commonplace" tradition. Nathaniel Lee is briefly noted as an author, "who

wrote some things in conjunction with Dryden,¹ and "who had far more power and passion of an irregular and turbulent kind . . . and who might have done better things . . . had not his genius been perverted and rendered . . . abortive by carrying the vicious manner of his age to the greatest excess."² Hazlitt praises Congreve's comic productions with genuine enthusiasm, but he finds Congreve's excellence limited to those of his works inspired by "wit." His serious and tragic poetry is "commonplace."

His serious and tragic poetry is frigid and jejune to an unaccountable degree. His forte was the description of actual manners, whether elegant or absurd; and when he could not deride the one or embellish the other, his attempts at romantic passion or imaginary enthusiasm are forced, abortive, and ridiculous, or commonplace.³ Congreve's description of a ruin in The Mourning Bride is used to contrast with Shakespeare's description of Dover Cliff in King Lear; the former is an example of the kind of "stately commonplace" which pleased Dr. Johnson, while the latter could no more be appreciated by that critic than "the objects of a sixth sense."⁴ Otway is the only writer of the neo-classical school who has, in Hazlitt's opinion, produced "a tragedy . . . of indisputable excellence and lasting interest."⁵ The reason is that Otway had genuine depth of feeling: "Otway always touched the reader, for he had himself a heart."⁶

Hazlitt finds that eighteenth century English tragedy.

¹Works, VI, 357. ²Ibid. ³Ibid., p. 75.
⁴Ibid., IV, 176. ⁵Ibid., VI, 354. ⁶Ibid., VI, 355.
continues the French tradition. "We give [the French]... Addison; but we must keep Shakespeare to ourselves." The interest of Addison's *Cato* is confined to the "declamation," which is "feeble in itself." Mr. Kean will never play *Cato* for the same reason that he will play *Coriolanus*. "He can always play a living man; he cannot play a lifeless statue." The *Distressed Mother* by Ambrose Phillips is "a very good translation from Racine's *Andromache*." The play is typically French:

It is an alternation of topics, of *pros* and *cons*, on the casuistry of domestic and state affairs, and produced a great effect of *ennui* on the audience. When you hear one of the speeches in these rhetorical tragedies, you know as well what will be the answer to it, as when you see the tide coming up the river--you know that it will return again.

Nicholas Rowe has the neo-classical temperament. He never yields to impulse and never loses his consciousness of himself. Hazlitt describes this author's character and work.

The genius of Rowe was slow and timid, and loved the ground: he had not 'a Muse of fire... ' but he had art and judgment enough to accommodate the more daring flights of a ruder age to the polished well-bred mediocrity of the age he lived in. We may say of Rowe... 'all his lines were equally good.' The compliment is after all equivocal; but it is one which may be applied generally to all poets, who in their productions are always thinking of what they shall say, and of what others have said, and who are never hurried into excesses of any kind, good or bad, by trusting implicitly to the impulse of their own genius or of the subject.

Some modern tragedy belongs in the category of the "poetry of commonplaces." Hazlitt devotes much of his essay

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"On Reason and Imagination" to criticizing contemporary social philosophers who approach social issues in a vague, abstract fashion; he finds that modern literature has taken a cue from social philosophy and likewise makes abstraction and logical argument its ideal. Both should instead focus upon the concrete representation of individual human suffering in order to achieve their mutual aim of arousing sympathy and encouraging universal benevolence.

It is not merely the fashion among philosophers—the poets also have got into a way of scouting individuality as beneath the sublimity of their . . . genius. The philosophers have become mere logicians, and their rivals mere rhetoricians; for as these last must float on the surface, and are not allowed to be harsh and crabbed and recondite like the others, by leaving out the individual, they become common-place. They cannot reason and they must declaim.¹

Modern tragedy is now moved only "by the sole expansive power of words." The result is a familiar one:

We have not now a number of dramatis personae affected by particular incidents and speaking according to their feelings, or as the occasion suggests, but each mounting the rostrum and delivering his opinion on fate, fortune, and the entire consummation of things.²

In the essay "On Reason and Imagination," Hazlitt's example of a "mere rhetorician" is Lord Byron. And we find that Hazlitt says the same thing of Byron's Marino Faliero that he does of French tragedy: The play contains a minimum of plot and character, and a maximum of windy dialogue. (Byron's intrusion of his own personality into the play is less characteristic of the poetry of "commonplaces" than it

¹Works, XII, 53. ²Ibid.
is of the "poetry of paradox," however.) In *Marino Faliero* the audience learns nothing substantial about the characters, but a great deal "about their sentiments and opinions on matters in general"¹—and these sentiments are obviously Lord Byron's own.

"The Commonplace" in Other Genres

Hazlitt does not make any really significant use of the term "commonplace" outside his discussion of tragedy. He uses the word in connection with Thomson and Gray; and to a certain extent, he makes use of the concept in his judgment of both of them.

Thomson is a poet of genuine feeling, original genius, even of "imagination," whose style is occasionally "commonplace," and whose lapses result from sheer laziness. "He mounts upon stilts, not out of vanity, but indolence."² "He takes advantage of all the most trite and mechanical commonplace of imagery and diction as a kindly relief to his Muse."³ Or he is willing to evade instead of encountering the difficulties of his subject, fills up the intervals of true inspiration with the most vapid and worthless materials, pieces out a beautiful half-line with a bombastic allusion, or overloads an exquisitely natural sentiment or image with a cloud of painted, pompous, cumbrous phrases, like the shower of roses, in which he represents the spring.⁴

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¹Works, XIX, 44. ²Ibid., V, 86.
³Ibid. ⁴Ibid.
juneness" in Cowper's manner,¹ and to the "tinsel and splendid patchwork" of Collins.²)

Hazlitt's criticism of Gray is interesting, for Hazlitt appears there to praise what he usually dislikes—the general and the didactic. But Hazlitt, it seems to me, usually evaluates a poet at least partially in terms of his purpose. Therefore, he does not criticize a poet for "moralizing" if that is all the poet has set out to do. The writer of tragedy is committed, because of the nature of the genre, to depicting character concretely. The writer of the discursive poem is not necessarily so involved. Gray becomes "commonplace" at times, not because he is general or didactic, but because his inspiration is not genuine. When his thoughts and feelings are borrowed, he fails; when they are genuinely his own, he succeeds.

Gray's Pindaric Odes are ... generally given up at present: they are stately and pedantic, a kind of methodical borrowed phrenzy. But I cannot so easily give up, nor will the world be in any haste to part with his Elegy in a Country Church-yard: it is one of the most classical productions that ever was penned by a refined and thoughtful mind, moralising on human life. Mr. Coleridge (in his Literary Life) says, that his friend Mr. Wordsworth had undertaken to shew that the language of the Elegy is unintelligible: it has, however, been understood! The Ode on a Distant Prospect of Eton College is more mechanical and commonplace; but it touches on certain strings about the heart.³

In the modern period, Lord Byron is again identified with the "poetry of commonplaces," particularly in his Childe Harold's Pilgrimage. According to Hazlitt, Byron's practice

¹ Works, V, 92. ² Ibid., p. 115. ³ Ibid., p. 118.
was to take "commonplace thoughts and events, and to express them in stronger and statelier language than others." In his review of Canto IV Hazlitt says, "The judgments pronounced are often more dogmatical than profound, and with all their extravagance of expression, commonplace."

Byron's Childe Harold contains a lofty and impassioned review of the great events of history, of the mighty objects left as wrecks of time, but he dwells chiefly on what is familiar to the mind of every schoolboy; has brought out few new traits of feeling or thought; and has done no more than justice to the reader's preconceptions by the sustained force and brilliancy of his style and imagery.

Hazlitt's criticism of the periodical essay contains some applications of his concept of the "commonplace." Hazlitt considers the periodical essay to be, by tradition, dramatic in nature. He therefore prefers Steele to Montaigne because Steele "good-naturedly lets you into the secret both of his own affairs and those of others." Likewise, Steele is more genuinely dramatic than Addison. The following comparison of Addison and Steele sounds very much like one of Hazlitt's remarks on classical tragedy. Steele is superior to Addison:

The indications of character and strokes of humor are more true and frequent; the reflections that suggest themselves arise more from the occasion, and are less spun out into regular dissertations. They are more like the remarks which occur in sensible conversation. ... Something is left to the understanding of the reader.

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1 Works, XI, 73. 2 Ibid., XIX, 36. 3 Ibid., XI, 73. 4 Ibid., VI, 95. 5 Ibid. 6 Ibid., p. 97.
Dr. Johnson, in The Rambler loses "the dramatic and conversational turn which forms the distinguishing feature and greatest charm of the Spectator and Tatler." The Rambler is a collection of moral essays, or scholastic theses, written on set subjects, and of which the individual characters and incidents are merely artificial illustrations, brought in to give a pretended relief to the dryness of didactic discussion.

The thoughts and imagery are generally borrowed, and are therefore "commonplace."

The Rambler is a splendid and imposing commonplace book of general topics, and rhetorical declamation on the conduct and business of human life. In this sense, there is hardly a reflection that has been suggested on such subjects which is not to be found in this celebrated work, and there is, perhaps, hardly a reflection to be found in it which had not been already suggested and developed by some other author, or in the common course of conversation.

Johnson has just enough originality to save his "reasoning and imagery" from being "perfect commonplace." But Hazlitt feels that Johnson's style makes his writing appear to be more commonplace than it actually is.

What is really striking and valuable, is lost in the vain ostentation and circumlocution of the expression; for when we find the same pains and pomp of diction bestowed upon the most trifling as upon the most important parts of a sentence . . . we grow tired of distinguishing between pretension and reality, and are disposed to confound the tinsel and bombast of the phraseology with want of weight in the thoughts. Thus, from the imposing and oracular nature of the style, people are tempted first to imagine that our author's speculations are all wisdom and profundity: till having found out their mistake in some instances, they suppose that there is nothing but commonplace in them, concealed

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1 Works, VI, 99-100. 2 Ibid., p. 100. 3 Ibid. 4 Ibid., p. 101.
under verbiage and pedantry; and in both they are both wrong.¹

Conclusion

Hazlitt consistently uses the term "commonsplace" to criticize those elements in a poem or play which lack genuine inspiration. When a poet makes use of "commonsplaces" he substitutes truisms for real feeling and insight. Characters, thoughts, and images are equally susceptible of such conventional treatment. To Dr. Johnson, "a mountain is sublime, or a rose is beautiful, for that their name and definition imply."² French poets reject everything that is not "cast in a given mould--that is not stamped by custom--that is not sanctioned by authority."³ When James Thomson's vein of true inspiration ceases to operate, the poet fills in the interval with "commonsplaces"--with bombastic allusions, and "pompous, cumbrous phrases."⁴

Cool, detached "reason" is the psychological faculty which Hazlitt associates with the production of "poetry of commonsplaces." The didactic reasoner's excellence lies in "arranging, comparing, and arguing" those general results of human nature "which are constantly repeated and always the same."⁵ "Creatures of abstraction" have no need for concrete, highly individual imagery, because to them, "the images of things . . . throw off . . . all their complexity and

¹Works, VI, 101. ²Ibid., IV, 176. ³Ibid., XVI, 89. ⁴Ibid., V, 86. ⁵Ibid., IV, 175.
distinctions, and are lost in the general class, or name.\textsuperscript{1}

We can infer that even more than "wit," "reason" is an inferior principle of poetry, for the highest kind of comic "wit" is capable of producing a moral effect upon mankind, although it can never be the source of a completely "true" picture of human nature. But "reason," when it addresses itself to human nature, can be neither moral nor true.\textsuperscript{2} It fails as an interpreter of human truth because it categorizes and abstracts. It fails in moral effect because it fails in all effect—the abstractions of "reason" in literary embodiment being mere vague outlines with none of the potentially communicative vividness upon which the effect of "wit" as well as of "imagination" depends. Therefore "reason" is particularly inadequate as the creative principle of tragic drama. To achieve its ideal effect, the tragic

\textsuperscript{1}\textit{Works}, XVI, 89-90.

\textsuperscript{2}Hazlitt's distinction between political and moral justice has some interest here. Political justice, having as its end "the general good," is an affair of "reason." But political justice can only be realized through the use of force, and has nothing to do with real benevolence or virtue. Thus, reason is applied in the establishment of civil laws; but these merely prevent men from harming one another. The real morality is positive. Moral justice relates to individual good or "goodness." The source of moral justice, or real benevolence and virtue lies in individual wills and affections, over which law can exercise no real influence except restraint. Godwin was wrong to fuse political and moral justice, leaving society unprotected by force, and leaving individual rights at the mercy of imperfect individual wills. Those who would attempt to legislate real morality are equally wrong. (See "Project for a New Theory of Civil and Criminal Legislation," \textit{Works}, XIX, 302-320.)
dramatist must conceive and represent human beings in the most concrete and appealing manner possible, for profound sympathy can only be evoked through such truthful representation. Since "reason" perceives and represents phenomena abstractly, the tragedy of "reason" depicts human nature either too vaguely or too falsely to arouse pity at all. Thus, Hazlitt compared the effect of a tragedy by Shakespeare with the effect of a tragedy by Voltaire: "When Othello kills himself, . . . the blow strikes not only at him but at us: when Crosman in Zaire . . . does the same thing, he falls—like a commonplace personified."¹

Hazlitt's comments on the "poetry of commonplaces" seem to me to be a bit "commonplace" themselves. One cannot help feeling that Hazlitt has substituted some truisms for originality of thought and feeling, and that his remarks on French tragedy have the tone of adopted dogma—a dogma whose source could be either English or German criticism.² However, these comments are consistent with his theory of the "sympathetic imagination" and with his concept of "reason"; and as Rene Wellek points out, Hazlitt's distaste for French literature is limited to his dislike for French tragedy, and did not extend to a prejudice against French literature as a whole such as Wordsworth and Coleridge held.³

¹Works, XVI, 90.
²Wellek, II, 28, 67, 122, 136, 185. ³Ibid., p. 211.
CHAPTER VI

THE POETRY OF PARADOX

As has been discussed above, the Elizabethan Age, according to Hazlitt, offered a more favorable environment for the creation of poetry than any other period in English history. The picturesqueness of the social customs, the danger everywhere prevalent, the novelty afforded by the discovery of the New World and by the revival of classical literature, all provided stimuli which the "imagination" could not resist. In addition, the pervasive force of Renaissance Christianity encouraged the passions of benevolence and sympathy in all members of society, redeeming man "from the worship of that idol, self."¹ In general, the spirit of the Elizabethan Age was favorable to a union of passion and sympathy with the highest inventive principle of poetry, the "imagination" and the Elizabethan poetry of "sympathetic imagination" is defined by this union of invention with moral sensibility. The poetry of modern times is defined by their separation.²

¹Works, VI, 184.
²Invention in this instance (and in others in which Hazlitt refers to the lack of "invention" in modern poetry) seems to refer to the intellectual power which unites a conception with the appropriate means of expression. "Invention" in this sense thus relates to the finding of the subject or subjects in nature, history, or myth appropriate to express
poetry is divided into two classes, the poetry of "imagination" and the poetry of "sentiment." 1

The one consists in the power of calling up images of the most striking and pleasing kind; the other depends on the strength of the interest which it excites in given objects. The one may be said to arise out of the faculties of memory and invention, conversant with the world of external nature; the other from the fund of our moral sensibility. . . . The greatest poets of our own and other countries have been equally distinguished for richness of invention and depth of feeling. 2

The environment of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries was discouraging to "richness of invention"; and various social and intellectual forces kept the moral sentiments directed out of their normal path.

Progress of one kind or another has gradually caused a removal from the environment of potent stimuli to the "imagination." To begin with, scientific knowledge, and the habits of scientific observation have cast a veil over men's natural impressions of the beauty and power of nature, so that impressions of natural phenomena have become far less suffused with passion, or fear, or superstitious veneration.

or give body to thought and feeling. "Invention" may also refer to the finding of the appropriate structure or form for a poem; or it may refer to the finding of the most appropriate style of expression. Sometimes the word seems to carry with it the special connotation of originality in the creation of subject, form, and style. In at least one instance, it refers to originality of feeling. For various applications of the term, see particularly Hazlitt's review, "Sismondi's Literature of the South," Works, XVI, 24-57.

1 The meaning of "poetry of imagination" in the passage above is totally different from the meaning of "poetry of imagination" in reference to Shakespeare, Milton, and Chaucer. Hazlitt is apparently speaking here of the "poetry of fancy" as discussed in Chapter III.

2 Works, XIX, 18-19.
Men have come to see nature more habitually through the dispassionate light of the "understanding."

It cannot be concealed, however, that the progress of knowledge and refinement to circumscribe the wings of poetry. Religious and poetical enthusiasm is much the same; and both have received a sensible shock from the progress of experimental philosophy. As in looking into the mazes of a tangled wood we fill them with what shapes we please, we make gods or devils of the first object we see, and set no bounds to the willful suggestions of our hopes and fears.

The increasing tameness and safety of modern civilization is an impediment to poetry of the same kind. It removes the passions inspired by danger, and leaves matter-of-fact. In the modern age, people are "less exposed to the vicissitudes of good or evil"—either to "wild beasts," or "bandits fierce" or the "unmitigated fury of the elements." "Society, by degrees, is constructed into a machine that carries us safely and insipidly from one end of life to the other, in a very comfortable prose style." Only Sir Walter Scott in the present generation makes use of nature as though science and modern civilization had never been.

The Author of Waverley wears the palm of legendary lore along. It may be asked, 'Have we no materials for romance in England? for supply of whatever is original and striking in this kind?' And we answer—'Yes!' Every foot of soil is with us worked up; nearly every movement of the social machine is calculable. We have no room left for violent catastrophes; for grotesque quaintnesses; for wizard spells.

The progress toward democracy has dulled the color and picturesqueness of the social environment and removed

1Works, V, 9. 2Ibid., p. 10. 3Ibid. 4Ibid., XI, 62.
As a result of the levelling of social distinctions, the surface of society is no longer "embossed with hieroglyphics," for the colorful "badges of different professions" and "distinctions of dress" characteristic of the Elizabethan Age no longer present a "visible language to the imagination."\(^1\) Democracy itself simply does not provide fit subjects for poetry, for "the principle of poetry is a very anti-levelling principle."\(^2\)

The cause of the people is indeed but little calculated as a subject for poetry: it admits of rhetoric, which goes into argument and explanation, but it presents no immediate or distinct images to the mind. . . . The language of poetry naturally falls in with the language of power. . . . The imagination . . . is an aristocratical, the [understanding\(^3\) a republican faculty. The strong influence of democratic ideas and of political liberalism upon the poets who were Hazlitt's contemporaries reinforces these environmental effects. The poets in particular have become preoccupied with equality of value in all people and things so that they conscientiously ignore whatever remaining rank, pomp, and circumstance, whatever colorful distinctions still exist. Wordsworth was taught by his political opinions to "say to the vain pomp and glory of the world, 'I hate ye.'"\(^4\) Furthermore, while Milton and Shakespeare had an instinctive knowledge of "what was grand in the objects of nature, or affecting in the events of human life,"\(^5\) modern poets value on principle the mean and obscure people, and the small, unprepossessing objects in nature or art. But a simply

1. Works, VI, 190-91. 2. Ibid., IV, 214. 3. Ibid. 4. Ibid., XI, 88. 5. Ibid., V, 53.
utilitarian object cannot produce sentiment and emotion: "A table, a chair, a fire-shovel, a Dutch-stove are useful things, but they do not excite much sentiment—they are not confessedly the poetry of human life."\(^1\)

In Hazlitt's analysis, the social revolution is more responsible for the character of modern poetry than any other cause. There may be little in the environment to stimulate the "imagination," but there is a great deal in the modern social scene which stimulates "understanding" and self-centered feeling—the faculties which are the formative principles of modern poetry. The inspiration of much modern poetry is not external nature, therefore, but some idea, internalized by different poets as their private whims and temperaments direct. The most important idea is the idea of revolution. According to Hazlitt, the modern school of poetry originated in the "sentiments and opinions" which produced the French Revolution, and distinguished itself from the "servile imitation" and "tame commonplace" of the poets preceding them by rising to the "utmost pitch of singularity and paradox."\(^2\) All the authority of the modern poets must be thrown into the scale of Revolution and Reform. Their Jacobin principles indeed gave rise to their Jacobin poetry. . . . Their genius, their style, their versification, everything down to their spelling, was revolutionary. Their poetical innovations unhappily did not answer any more than the French Revolution.\(^3\)

The Revolutionary habit of mind is a particularly

\(^1\)Works, XII, 191.  \(^2\)Ibid., V, 161.
\(^3\)Ibid., VII, 181-82.
dangerous one for a poet to adopt. With its disrespect for established authority, the revolutionary point of view encourages complete self reliance—and complete self reliance easily degenerates into vanity and mere self-opinion. The poet becomes separated, thus, from the authority of nature, the most important authority of all. The greatest poets of the past always sought an authority outside themselves.

We confess, however much we may admire independence of feeling and erectness of spirit in general or practical questions, . . . we prefer him who bows to the authority of nature, who appeals to actual objects, to moulderin~ superstitions, to history, observation, and tradition.¹

In the greatest poetry, such as Shakespearean tragedy, the poet seeks to identify himself through sympathy with a nature outside his own, and thus submits to its authority. The modern poet seeks to identify himself "only with what can enter into no competition with him."²

In Hazlitt's opinion, great poetry is bound indissolubly to the human nature of both its subject and its audience; it must express and appeal to the first principles of the general human mind, heart, and sense. And Hazlitt seems to believe that without a force, either of genuine passion, or of some externally imposed obligation, the poet may write to please himself alone. Consequently, the poet who respects and accepts even a political authority has an advantage over the poet engaged in creating private systems. The revolutionary poet, by becoming concerned with laws and systems, becomes distracted

¹Works, XI, 71. ²Ibid., V, 163.
from his real subject, individual human nature. He volun-
tarily risks losing his audience altogether, outraging his
public's feelings and understandings through his shocking
proposals; and, paradoxically, by losing his audience he
also loses his only chance to improve society. The poet who
serves a king, on the other hand, feels bound to support the
social order as it stands, and attempts to please both his
patrons and the general public.

It is because the slaves of power mind the cause they
have to serve, because their own interest is concerned;
but the friends of liberty always sacrifice their cause,
which is only the cause of humanity, to their own spleen,
vanity, and self-opinion. The link between tyrants and
slaves is a chain of adamant; the bond between poets
and the people is a rope of sand.¹

The modern poets usually cut themselves off from the
authority of nature (and hence, sympathetic identification
with it) in still another way, for they were primarily in-
fluenced by the philosophers of the period who made a fetish
of novelty and change.

The greatest number of minds seem utterly incapable
of fixing on any conclusion, except from the pressure
of custom and authority: opposed to these, there is
another class less numerous but pretty formidable, who
in all their opinions are equally under the influence
of novelty and restless vanity. The prejudices of the
one are counter-balanced by the paradoxes of the other.²

The danger of such fetishes was pointed out in the introductory
section on "reason." Social philosophers such as Rousseau,
Godwin, and Bentham, in single-minded devotion to improvement
and change, cut themselves away from direct experience of
nature, and theorized about humanity and its problems with

¹Works, XIX, 37. ²Ibid., VIII, 146.
insufficient knowledge of their subject. Their characteristic self-absorption permitted them to develop logical systems that have little basis in empirical reality. Bentham sees only that part of nature which "suits his purpose" or some "foregone conclusion," looking for "facts and passing occurrences" only in order to put them into his private logical machinery.\(^1\) Godwin's social schemes were reduced to failure and ill repute because he based them on partial observation of human nature. Ignoring the elements of passion motivating human behavior, Godwin attributes to enlightened "reason" sufficient power to motivate moral action.\(^2\) Intensity of feeling prevented Rousseau from "admitting the operation of other causes which interfered with his favorite purpose, and involved him in endless wilful contradictions."\(^3\)

Such philosophy, of course, had little truth, and negligible effect. Hazlitt finds the modern poets to be temperamentally lawless creatures. Without the compelling force of sympathetic passion, their irresponsibility is even worse than that of the social philosophers: "None so ready as the poets\(^7\) to carry every paradox to its most revolting and ridiculous excess--none so sure to caricature . . . every feature of the prevailing philosophy!"\(^4\)

In the age of rebellious self-sufficiency, vanity is a more natural habit of mind than sympathy. All the major poets are characterized as vain. "\(^7\)Coleridge\(^7\) has no

\(^1\)Works, XI, 7. \(^2\)Ibid., p. 21. \(^3\)Ibid., IV, 89. 
\(^4\)Ibid., VIII, 151-52.
satisfaction but in the reflection of his own image in the public gaze, but in the repetition of his own name in the public ear."¹ Hazlitt speaks of Wordsworth's "inordinate vanity"² and arbitrary "egotism."³ Shelley is "held back by none of the merely mechanical checks of sympathy."⁴ And Byron "exists not by sympathy, but by antipathy." "He scorns all things, even himself."⁵ In describing the whole school of modern poets, Hazlitt says,

A thorough adept in this school of poetry and philanthropy is jealous of all excellences but his own. He does not even like to share his reputation with his subject; for he would have it all proceed from his own power and originality of mind.... He tolerates only what he himself creates; he sympathises only with what can enter into no competition with him.⁶

As sympathy and vanity are opposites, so are sympathy and party spirit. For devotion to faction implies a self-willed and self-satisfied enforcing of narrowness of vision upon oneself. Vanity produced perhaps an unconscious evasion of truth and nature, while a devotion to one side of an issue is likely to produce a willful evasion. The great "obstacles to social improvement" have been caused by "the petulance of party spirit" and the "perversities of self-will and self-opinion."⁷ Again,

with one party, whatever is, is right: with their antagonists, whatever is, is wrong. These swallow every antiquated absurdity: those catch at every new,

¹Works, VIII, 93. ²Ibid., p. 343n. ³Ibid., XIX, 161. ⁴Ibid., VIII, 149. ⁵Ibid., XI, 69. ⁶Ibid., V, 163. ⁷Ibid., XVI, 268.
unfledged project—and are alike enchanted with the velocipedes or the French Revolution.¹

But poetical and moral (human and social) truth can best be discovered against a background of unified opinion. Thus, the nineteenth century contrasts unfavorably in this respect with the Elizabethan Age, with its unity of moral purpose. Hazlitt praises the Edinburgh Review as a magazine, and Francis Jeffrey as editor, for attempting to unite the opposing camps by temperateness, and by an attempt to treat issues without bias.

The Editor is bound to lend a patient hearing to the most paradoxical opinions and extravagant theories which have resulted in our own times . . . but he is disposed to qualify them by . . . speculative doubts . . . arising out of actual circumstances and prevailing opinions, or the frailties of human nature.²

The combined result of these forces is the destruction of the proper balance of mind. Nineteenth century poetry indicates that "the real powers and resources of the mind are lost and dissipated in a conflict of opinions and passions, of obstinacy against levity, of bigotry against self-conceit."³

The "imagination" of Elizabethan times, which incorporated passion, sense, and intellect, might be said, in the modern period, to have disintegrated; its components, which once worked in harmony with one another, now work at odds against each other. In the Elizabethan period, the passionate "imagination" directed the mind outward toward objects. Both intellect and feeling as well as sense were necessary for

¹ Works, VIII, 147. ² Ibid., XI, 130.
³ Ibid., VIII, 147.
comprehending the nature of the object, but they remained subordinate only to the egotistical whims of the poet. Bowing to no external authority, the poet may distort the world of concrete experience at his pleasure.

One might note, in passing, that in Hazlitt's discussions of nineteenth century poetry, the "imagination" degenerates commonly into equivalence with lawless and licentious "fancy." Of Childe Harold's Pilgrimage, Hazlitt says, "It is an indigestion of the mind." Further, "it is the lassitude on feverish tossing and tumbling of the imagination, after having taken a surfeit of pleasure, and fed upon the fumes of pride."\(^1\) Shelley's poems abound in "horrible imaginings."\(^2\) Coleridge's "imagination" is a luxuriant one, but it is "wild, irregular, overwhelming."\(^3\) The passage from "The Character of Mr. Wordsworth's Excursion"\(^4\) which distinguishes "the poetry of imagination" from "the poetry of sentiment" quoted earlier in this chapter definitely indicates that Hazlitt is not thinking here of the Elizabethan "sympathetic imagination." This later "poetry of imagination" consists merely in "calling up images of the most striking or pleasing kind."\(^4\) Its sources are "memory and invention," while "moral sensibility" is the source of the poetry of sentiment.\(^5\) Such "poetry of imagination" has a greater affinity with the "poetry of fancy" described in the third chapter, than with

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\(^1\) Works, XIX, 35. \(^2\) Ibid., XVI, 273.  
\(^3\) Ibid., XI, 35. \(^4\) Ibid., XIX, 18. \(^5\) Ibid., p. 19.
"poetry of imagination" described in the second.

The two kinds of poetry of unbalanced inspiration which appear in modern times, then, are really the "poetry of fancy" and the "poetry of sentiment"; the poetry of sense opposed to the poetry of feeling and intellect. The greatest literary figures of the period, with the exception of Keats, did not write "poetry of fancy." Instead, it was the minor figures, Campbell and Moore, whose inspiring faculty was the "fancy." Sir Walter Scott's poetry also belongs to the category. It is crippled by the absence of genuine feeling.

Mr. Scott has great intuitive power of fancy, great vividness of pencil in placing external objects and events before the eye. The force of his mind is picturesque rather than moral. He gives more of the features of nature than the soul of passion. . . . There is no determinate impression left on the mind by reading his poetry. It has no results. The reader rises up from the perusal with new images and associations, but he remains the same that he was before.  

The men of genius, Wordsworth, Coleridge, Byron, and Shelley, wrote the poetry of passion and feeling, a poetry crippled by its loss of contact with direct and full experience of objects of external nature. These poets, like Godwin, Bentham, and Rousseau, chose the parts of objects, the aspects of human nature, which suited their logical biases, political schemes, or private feelings. It was superior in its own time, but sadly lacking when compared with the achievement of the past.

Before considering the individual poets, it might be well to summarize briefly the literary characteristics of the school of poets whose thoughts and feelings were infected

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1Works, V, 154-55.
by the idea of revolution. Revolutionary sentiment inspired
a violent reaction against the "commonplace" poetry of the
preceding period. That poetry had been "trite," "insipid,"
and "mechanical." ¹ But after the Revolution, poetry changed
"from the most servile imitation and tamest common-place, to
the utmost pitch of singularity and paradox." ²

The change in the belles-lettres was as complete, and to
many persons as startling, as the change in politics,
with which it went hand in hand . . . The world was to
be turned topsy-turvy; and poetry . . . was to share
its fate and begin de novo. ³

As social conventions were scoffed at, poetical conventions
were likewise discarded. The "modern school" cast out the
stock figures of poetic diction along with rhyme, and any
other sort of artificial elegance or arrangement.

All the commonplace figures of poetry, tropes, alleg-
gories, personifications, with the whole heathen myth-
ology, were instantly discarded; a classical allusion
was considered as a piece of antiquated foppery . . .
Authority and fashion, elegance or arrangement, were
hooted out of countenance. ⁴

The modern poets do not know how to excite the interest of a
general audience, or perhaps have ceased to think the endeavor
worthwhile. Their democratic prejudices prevent them from
choosing the grand and splendid subjects which naturally
attract the awe and admiration of the world. "All that has
ever excited the attention or admiration of the world, they
look upon with the most perfect indifference; and are surprised
to find that the world repays their indifference with scorn." ⁵

⁴ Ibid., p. 162. ⁵ Ibid., p. 53.
Instead of using the natural means of holding an audience's attention, appealing to men's natural response to grandeur, beauty, and power, the modern poets seek to excite attention by shocking their audiences—by reversing "established standards of opinion and estimation in the world."

Their intentions are always easily misunderstood, for they attempt to produce their striking effects in unexpected places. The revolutionary, paradoxical content of their work puts them beyond the reach of the average reader.

The chief disadvantage of knowing more and seeing farther than others, is not to be generally understood. A man is, in consequence of this, liable to start paradoxes, which immediately transport him beyond the reach of the common-place reader.  

Hazlitt sums up the qualities of the paradox-inspired poet in much the same way that he summarized the qualities of the poet of "imagination" or "nature." In general character, the two kinds of poets and poetry are almost direct opposites.

A thorough adept in this school of poetry . . . is jealous of all excellence but his own. He does not even like to share his reputation with his subject; for he would have it all proceed from his own power and originality of mind. Such a one is slow to admire anything that is admirable; feels no interest in what is most interesting to others, no grandeur in anything grand, no beauty in anything beautiful. He tolerates only what he himself creates; he sympathizes only with what can enter into no competition with him.

Southey and Landor: The Literary Jacobins

Landor and Southey perhaps have the least literary stature of the "poets of paradox," in Hazlitt's opinion, and

1Works, V, 53. 2Ibid., VIII, 279-80. 3Ibid., V, 163.
Hazlitt's discussion of them as poets is not particularly interesting or revealing. However, Hazlitt considers both poets to exemplify in an extreme form the mental attitudes fostered by a society in a period of revolution and change, and Hazlitt names these poets the "literary Jacobins."

Although literary Jacobinism is a result of political Jacobinism, it is important to emphasize that Hazlitt does not consider political and literary Jacobinism to partake of the same spirit. The political Jacobin is likely to be a stable, serious person, motivated by a sincere love of humanity and a genuine devotion to truth. Hazlitt defines the true political Jacobin as follows:

The true Jacobin hates the enemies of liberty as they hate liberty, with all his strength and with all his might, and with all his heart, and with all his soul.

. . . His hatred of wrong only ceases with the wrong.

. . . The love of truth is a passion in his mind, as the love of power is a passion in the minds of others.

. . . The love of power is the love of ourselves. The one is real; the other often but an empty dream. Hence the defection of modern apostates.¹

Liberty for the literary Jacobin, however, does not mean something social, civil, or universal, but only something personal. The literary Jacobin claims absolute liberty for himself, but wishes to tyrannically impose his ideas in a most authoritarian manner upon the rest of the world.

We mean by this term "literary Jacobinism," that despotism of the mind, which only emancipates itself from authority and prejudice, to grow impatient of every thing like an appearance of opposition, and to domineer over and dictate its sudden, crude, violent, and

¹*Works*, VII, 151-52.
varying opinions, to the rest of the world.¹

Love of mankind may be one of the protestations of the literary Jacobin, but it is not necessarily sincere. The real love of the literary Jacobin is for himself. "The love of liberty is the love of others." But "an inordinate, restless, incorrigible self-love, is the key to all the literary Jacobins' actions and opinions."²

Hazlitt puts great emphasis on the fact that "the love of truth" is not a ruling passion in the literary Jacobin's mind. The main source of truth for such a man is his own mind, his own undisciplined thoughts and feelings, which not only have little to do with direct concrete experience, but have little basis in matter-of-fact, or even in logical consistency. Therefore, the literary Jacobin is not embarrassed by obvious falsehoods. Inconsistency is a matter of course to one who knows no law but his own.

Truth to be welcome must be a rare discovery of their own; they only woo her as a youthful bride; and are too soon satiated with the possession of what they desire, out of fickleness, or as the gloss of novelty wears off—or sue out a divorce from jealousy, and a dread of rivals in the favor of their former mistress.³

Only to preserve his distinctiveness, the literary Jacobin rejects the opinion he once prized. To agree with the literary Jacobin is "an impertinence"; to differ from him, "a crime."⁴

[Literary Jacobinism]⁷ seizes with avidity on all that

¹Works, XVI, 242. ²Ibid., p. 243.
³Ibid., pp. 244-45. ⁴Ibid., p. 243.
is startling or obnoxious in opinions, and when they are countenanced by any one else, discards them as no longer fit for its use. Thus persons of this temper affect atheism by way of distinction; and if they can succeed in bringing it into fashion, become orthodox again in order, not to be with the vulgar.  

As mentioned above, Hazlitt's primary examples of literary Jacobinism are the works and personalities of Landor and Southey. In his criticism of Landor's Imaginary Conversations, Hazlitt says,  

We consider the spirit which we have here attempted to analyze, as maintained in a state of higher concentration in this work than in any other we have for some time seen. Some of Mr. Southey's lucubrations contain pretty good samples of it; but in him it is 'dashed and brewed' with other elements. . . . Mr. Landor keeps a private still of his own, where the unrectified spirit remains in its original vigour and purity—cold, indeed, and without the frothy effervescence of its first running, but unabated in activity, strength and virulence.  

The actual analysis of the Imaginary Conversations is disappointing. Hazlitt does not demonstrate in any striking manner that the Imaginary Conversations is either "flagrantly untruthful" or characterized by a maddening logical inconsistency.  

The kind of lapses in fact cited by Hazlitt seem to be relatively trivial ones. A character is made to say that Locke is "'the most elegant of English prose writers.'"  

John Home should not have been represented as a "quiet contented parish minister" when in reality, "he abandoned the clerical profession, and went about a fine gentleman, with a blue coat and a pigtail."  

Hazlitt primarily succeeds, it seems to me,  

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1Works, XVI, 243.  2Ibid., p. 244.  
3Ibid., p. 240.  4Ibid., p. 241.  5Ibid., p. 259.
in demonstrating that Landor has no regard for accepted opinions. If Landor expresses outrageous ideas, Hazlitt does not say what they are.

Hazlitt does not demonstrate that Landor's love of liberty is only a superficial one. Instead, Hazlitt expresses his irritation with Landor's treatment of Napoleon in the Imaginary Conversations, although he does not state his reasons for his irritation very explicitly. Of Conversation XI, ('Buonaparte and the President of the Senate') Hazlitt says,

Let Mr. Landor cancel it--let his publishers strike their asterisks through it. It is short, and not sweet. These fabulous stories about the expedition into Egypt, these low-minded and scurrilous aspersions on Buonaparte, which the Tories palmed upon the credulity of their gulls, the Jacobin poets, have been long discarded by the inventors, and linger only in the pages, rankle only in the hearts of their converts.¹

Hazlitt also condemns a conversation containing an argument which would justify a possible assassination of Napoleon. Romero Alpuente argues to Lope· Banos, that human society is justified in condemning the "city-breaker" as well as a "house-breaker" to die.² Hazlitt interprets the dialogue as an attack upon the "Corsican hero."³ Quoting from this dialogue at length, Hazlitt offers it not with any view to comment on the sentiments it conveys, but to justify what we have said of the outrageous spirit that so frequently breaks out in the present work, and that might reasonably 'condemn

¹Works, XVI, 253-54. ²Ibid., p. 263. ³Ibid.
Perhaps the great logical inconsistency which Hazlitt sees in Landor consists in Landor's professed devotion to freedom, and his hatred of the man whom Hazlitt sees as the instrument of freedom, Napoleon.

The nature of Southey's literary Jacobinism can be more sharply delineated. Southey can preach obedience to a sovereign while he himself remains as independent as ever, defying all authority, including that of the sovereign whom he is supposed to serve. Hazlitt has much to say about Southey's retention of his revolutionary habits of mind during his service as poet laureate.

Mr. Southey is not of the court, courtly. . . . He is not a man cast in the mould of other men's opinions: he is not shaped on any model: he bows to no authority; he yields only to his own wayward peculiarities. . . . All is crude and chaotic, self-opinionated, vain. 2

Likewise, Southey's poetry is dominated by the attitudes, if not the opinions, of extreme political liberalism. Hazlitt particularly enjoys pointing out passages in which Southey patronizes or insults the royal family. A Vision of Judgment is not only written in experimental verse form, English hexameters, it contains offensive experimental opinions too.

Mr. Southey was not to try conclusions with Majesty—still less on such an occasion. The extreme freedoms with departed greatness, the party-petulance carried to the Throne of Grace, the unchecked indulgence of private humour . . . are pointed instances of what we have said. They show the singular state of over-excitement in Mr. Southey's mind, and the force of old habits

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1 Works, XVI, 263. 2 Ibid., XI, 81.
of independent and unbridled thinking, which cannot be kept down even in addressing his sovereign.

Hazlitt jeers at another court poem, the Lay of the Laureate, written in honor of the marriage of Princess Charlotte.

Not only do his sentiments everywhere betray the old Jacobinical leaven, the same unimpaired desperate unprincipled spirit of partisanship, regardless of time, place, and circumstance, and of everything but its own headstrong will; there is a gipsy jargon in the expression of his sentiments which is equally indecorous.

And Hazlitt gleefully points out a passage which seems to imply that the Princess should disobey her father if necessary, in order to support the policies of the Quarterly Review.

Hazlitt finds Southey indifferent to truth, claiming absolute freedom for himself in an area which demands discipline, and respect for the authority of nature. "Not truth, but self-opinion is the ruling principle of Mr. Southey's mind." Southey does not have the patience to study the world as it is, and therefore his picture of it must always be an erroneous one.

When Southey's chimeras and golden dreams of human perfectibility vanished from him, he turned suddenly round, and maintained that 'whatever is, is right.' Mr. Southey has not fortitude of mind, has not patience to think that evil is inseparable from the nature of things. . . . He must either repose on actual or imaginary good. . . . He is ever in extremes, and ever in the wrong.

Hazlitt takes advantage of the surreptitious publication of Wat Tyler, an early, revolutionary play of Southey's to

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1 Works, XI, 81. 2 Ibid., VII, 87. 3 Ibid., p. 88. 4 Ibid., XI, 79. 5 Ibid.
comment on the intellectual poverty of extreme political views, and also to discuss the shallowness of one who would change from one extreme to its opposite. Hazlitt feels that only a person whose sense of reality is vague to begin with could justify his complete about-face in opinion as Southey did, and not only justify the change, but vilify those who hold ideas he formerly shared.  

I do not believe Hazlitt considers any of the major "poets of paradox" to be as extreme literary Jacobins as he considers Southey and Landor to be. However, he finds the same spirit of a somewhat irresponsible individualism to be a shaping factor in the personality and poetry of them all.

**Wordsworth**

In his essay, *On the Living Poets*, Hazlitt cites Wordsworth, Coleridge, and Southey, as the originators of the "modern school" of poetry. Of these, Wordsworth receives the most extended and significant treatment. Perhaps Wordsworth's mind and poetry represent the school most perfectly: "Mr. Wordsworth's genius is a pure emanation of the Spirit of the Age." And the matter and style of Wordsworth's poetry coincides with the general description Hazlitt gives of the matter and style of the modern school.

Wordsworth's treatment of his subject shows the influence of the French Revolution. The poetry appears

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1 Works, VII, 168-86. 2 Ibid., XI, 86.
conscientiously democratic for several reasons. One is, that
Wordsworth chooses humble peasants rather than kings for his
protagonists. Hazlitt makes a more general statement about
Wordsworth's relation to democratic feeling:

His poetry partakes of, and is carried along with, the revolutionary movement of our age: the political changes of the day were the model on which he formed and conducted his poetical experiments. . . . His muse proceeds on a principle of equality, and strives to reduce all things to the same standard.

Therefore, Wordsworth "has struck into the sequestered vale of humble life, sought out the Muse among sheep-cotes and hamlets and the peasant's mountain-haunts." He prefers "the commonest events and objects . . . without any of the ornaments of dress or pomp of circumstances to set it off." Likewise, he discards "all the tinsel pageantry of verse," and he abandons poetic custom and tradition.

His popular, inartificial style gets rid (at a blow) of all the trappings of verse, of all the high places of poetry: 'the cloud capt towers,' . . . all the traditions of learning, all the superstitions of the age, are obliterated and effaced. . . . The harp of Homer, the trump of Pindar and Alcaeus are still.

Hazlitt's explanation of the character of Wordsworth's poetry in the light of its psychological origins is more subtle and satisfying than the explanation attributing its nature to the social revolution. Wordsworth's poetry and Rousseau's social philosophy share common characteristics in their content and mode of expression because of the similarity

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1 Works, XI, 87. 2 Ibid., p. 88. 3 Ibid., p. 87.
4 Ibid., p. 88. 5 Ibid., p. 87.
in the minds of the two writers. Both exhibit a consuming egotism which colors all their experience.

The writer who most nearly resembles him in our own times is the author of the *Lyrical Ballads*. We see no other difference between them, than that the one wrote in prose, the other in poetry. . . . Both create an interest out of nothing, or rather out of their own feelings; both weave numberless recollections into one sentiment; both wind their own being round whatever object occurs to them. . . . Rousseau, in a word, interests you in certain objects by interesting you in himself: Mr. Wordsworth would persuade you that the most insignificant objects are interesting in themselves, because he is interested in them.1

Although Hazlitt is neither exclusive nor doctrinaire in his criticism, he does assume that all serious poets, whose works contain a prominent dramatic element, have one purpose and seek one effect—that which is achieved by dramatic tragedy—truth of insight and morality of effect. As has been said above, real truth of insight into human nature can only be achieved by habitually cultivating an interest in others. Shakespeare was "the least of an egotist of anybody in the world."2

Mr. Wordsworth is the last man to 'look abroad into universality,' if that alone constituted genius: he looks at home into himself. . . . He is the greatest, that is, the most original poet of the present day, only because he is the greatest egotist. . . . He sits in the centre of his own being, and there 'enjoys bright day.' He does not waste a thought on others.3

The self-centredness of Wordsworth's feelings and interests naturally cuts off channels of insight which he would otherwise have had.

The current of his feelings is deep, but narrow; the range of his understanding is lofty and aspiring rather than discursive. The force with which he feels some things, make him indifferent to so many others. The simplicity and enthusiasm of his feelings, with respect to nature, renders him bigoted and intolerant in his judgment, of men and things.\textsuperscript{1}

Therefore, Wordsworth's egotism takes him out of the highest, Shakespearean level of poetry. He cannot "relish the variety and scope of dramatic composition," the greatest literary form.\textsuperscript{2} Not being able to identify himself with others, "he only familiarises himself or his readers with a stone, covered with lichens."\textsuperscript{3} His treatment of humanity is limited to his analysis of himself. He is influenced more by isolated thoughts and sentiments than by human beings. Wordsworth could never reveal a King Lear or an Othello, an heroic view of man which by nature compels sympathy.

Thus, Wordsworth's egotism as well as his political bias affects his choice and treatment of subjects. Because his interests are limited to himself and his own reactions to things, he chooses subjects which do not distract his attention from his private thoughts and feelings.

He hardly ever avails himself of striking subjects or remarkable combinations of events, but in general rejects them as interfering with the workings of his own mind, as disturbing the smooth, deep, majestic current of his own feelings.\textsuperscript{4}

As a result, Wordsworth's treatment of a subject is moulded, not by an attempt to grasp its real significance, but by an effort to grasp and communicate the personal significance the

\textsuperscript{1}Works, XI, 94.  \textsuperscript{2}Ibid., XI, 92.
\textsuperscript{3}Ibid., IV, 112.  \textsuperscript{4}Ibid., XIX, 10.
subject has for him. Ever intent upon the workings of his own mind, "he hangs a weight of thought and feeling upon every trifling circumstance connected with his past history."¹

He stamps that character, that deep individual interest, on whatever he meets. The object is nothing but as it furnishes food for internal meditation, for old associations.²

In speaking of the subject of The Excursion, Hazlitt says,

It is not so much a description of natural objects, as of the feelings associated with them, not an account of the manners of rural life, but the result of the Poet's reflections on it.³

Wordsworth perversely chooses commonplace subjects whose intrinsic power over the human mind is negligible. Rather than seek a universally affecting object, Wordsworth prefers to use those which affect him, and then attempts to persuade others to be affected in the same way. He risks distortion of reality in doing so, by choosing to make "his subject foil to his invention."⁴

Not requiring the stimulus of outward impressions, or from the want of an imagination teeming with various forms, he takes the common every day events and objects of Nature, or rather seeks those that are the most simple and barren of effect; but he adds to them a weight of interest from the resources of his own mind, which makes the most insignificant things serious and even formidable.⁵

The intention of the poet to make the subject suit his own mind renders him incapable of either seeing or "expressing" the object clearly. "The object is lost in the sentiment, as sound in the multiplication of echoes."⁶

¹Works, VIII, 44. ²Ibid. ³Ibid., XIX, 10. ⁴Ibid., XI, 88. ⁵Ibid., XIX, 19. ⁶Ibid., p. 10.
All accidental varieties and individual contrasts are lost in an endless continuity of feeling; like drops of water in the ocean stream. An intense intellectual egotism swallows up everything.¹

The result of all this is that the reader learns a great deal about Wordsworth, but in proportion, very little about the subject the poet has apparently chosen as a vehicle for his self-expression. "He may be said to create his own materials; his thoughts are his real subject."²

According to Hazlitt, Wordsworth's thoughts are the "real subject" of The Excursion. Because the poem contains narrative and dramatic elements in addition to the reflective, Hazlitt criticizes their effectiveness. The poem fails as an epic poem—which combines these elements of the narrative and the dramatic—but it still reveals a great poet.

The traditional epic poem such as Milton's Paradise Lost is "sublime" because its subject is a sublime one. (Hazlitt is not absolutely consistent in his application of this term. In one use, it refers to an object of nature, or subject of poetry which is intrinsically grand, powerful, and awe-inspiring. Measureless quantities such as the immensity of space, the distance between heaven and earth, that which the sense cannot conceive and only the "imagination" can fathom, are components of sublimity. Only the "imagination" can perceive nature as sublime.)³ Referring to Paradise Lost,

¹Works, XIX, 11. ²Ibid., p. 10.

³Hazlitt might be said, I think, to distinguish two types of the sublime, the epic and the dramatic. The "epic" depends on the emotions inspired by the grandeur of objects, usually remote and vague. The "dramatic" depends upon the
Hazlitt says, "The objects of epic poetry affect us through the medium of the imagination, by magnitude and distance.¹ These objects "inspire awe in the very idea of them."² In their perfection, dramatic and epic poetry "approximate to and strengthen one another."³ Milton's poem, however, was inspired by the "imagination." The inspiration of The Excursion, on the other hand, was personal thought and feeling, predominating to the extent that the "imaginative" quality of the poem, although not by any means extinguished, was dwarfed, and perverted from its proper course. As a matter of fact, Hazlitt feels that the poem would have been more satisfying had Wordsworth left out its epic and dramatic characteristics altogether. "We could have wished that Mr. Wordsworth had given to his work the form of a philosophic poem altogether, with only occasional digressions or allusions to particular instances."⁴ "He has chosen to encumber himself with a load of narrative and description, which, instead of assisting, hinders the progress and effect of the general reasoning."⁵

closest possible view of individual human nature. W. J. Bate describes Hazlitt's concept of dramatic sublimity. "The principles of connection and interrelation between the parts of an object . . . in the mutual interaction of various passions, feelings, and thoughts in the human character and their modifying each other--constitutes a primary aspect of concrete truth. Art, in its highest function tries to lay bare and communicate the value and meaning of this interrelation as it evolves in its concrete setting. To seize suggestively upon it with intense force and gusto, constitutes "sublimity." (Bate, Prefaces to Criticism, pp. 133-34.)

¹Works, V, 52. ²Ibid. ³Ibid., pp. 52-53. ⁴Ibid., XIX, 11. ⁵Ibid., p. 12.
Plot, story, and event (not differentiated by Hazlitt), although subordinate to the "thoughts" still form a part of the subject of The Excursion. As one might expect, Wordsworth has shunned in this narrative element "all that can raise the imagination or affect the passions." The poet sacrifices the element of the "sublime" in story to the more primary interest of his own thoughts and feelings.

In describing human nature, Mr. Wordsworth equally shuns the common vantage-ground of popular story, of striking incident, of fatal catastrophe, as illegitimate or vulgar modes of producing an effect. He has chosen a subject or story merely as "pegs or loops to hang thought and feeling on."

Wordsworth's treatment of character is hardly dramatic. Individual human nature is too oversimplified, as he presents it, to have actual truth to nature. Rather than being whole human beings, the characters only exhibit the qualities of an extremely general type. "Wordsworth scans the human race as the naturalist measures the earth's zone . . . without attending to the inequalities of surface."

He contemplates the passions and habits of men, not in their extremes, but in their first elements, their follies and vices, not at their height, . . . but as lurking in embryo, the seeds of disorder inwoven with . . . those simple forms of feeling, which mingle at once with his own identity, or with the stream of general humanity.

As was typical in "commonplace" tragedy there is very little dramatic distinction of character, and the dialogue is not

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1Works, XIX, p. 12. 2Ibid., pp. 10-11.
3Ibid., XI, 87. 4Ibid., XIX, 11. 5Ibid.
individualized. Only the poet speaks, although he expresses his thoughts through the mouths of various characters.

Even the dialogues introduced in the present volume are soliloquies of the same character, taking different views of the subject. The recluse, the pastor, and the pedlar, are three persons in one poet. We ourselves disapprove of these interlocutions between Lucius and Caius as impertinent babbling, where there is no dramatic distinction of character. But the evident scope and tendency of Mr. Wordsworth's mind is the reverse of dramatic.¹

It might finally be mentioned that Hazlitt finds Wordsworth's characters to be not only too generalized to be sympathized with, but almost repellent.

However, we may sympathize with Mr. Wordsworth in his attachment to groves and fields, we cannot extend the same admiration to their inhabitants, or to the manners of country life in general. We go along with him, while he is the subject of his own narrative, but we take leave of him when he makes pedlars and ploughmen his heroes and the interpreters of his sentiments. It is, we think, getting into low company, and company, besides, that we do not like.²

Wordsworth's powers of poetic invention appear strongest in his treatment of external as opposed to human nature. Even here, though, his egotism interferes with the clarity of his vision, and therefore with the clarity of his expression.

His descriptions of natural scenery are not brought home distinctly to the naked eye by forms and circumstances, but every object is seen through the medium of innumerable recollections, is clothed with the haze of imagination like a glittering vapor.³

Otherwise, Wordsworth's treatment of nature is the passionate kind Hazlitt describes in the essay, On Poetry in General. There is epic grandeur and sublimity of imagination in

¹Works, XIX, 11. ²Ibid., p. 20. ³Ibid., p. 10.
Wordsworth's conception and expression of the natural setting of The Excursion.

The poem of The Excursion resembles the country in which the scene is laid... It has the same overwhelming oppressive power... We are surrounded with the constant sense and superstitious awe of the collective power of matter, of the gigantic and eternal forms of Nature.

Wordsworth's "imagination" also had the power of making things seem grander than they appear to the "understanding." In Elizabethan poetry, this power was consistently a virtue. In modern poetry, however, the power is sometimes a virtue and sometimes not. It ceases to be when there is an element of willful distortion—a personal rather than a natural perception of an object. "He elevates the mean by the strength of his own aspirations; he clothes the naked with beauty and grandeur from the stores of his own recollections."2 "No one has shown the same imagination in raising trifles into importance."3 Still, Wordsworth's "imagination" is capable of apprehending some universal psychological truth. Hazlitt particularly admires one passage in which Wordsworth depicts a lonely shepherd unconsciously seeing external nature as the ancient Greeks saw it, and creating a parallel mythology.

The foregoing is one of a succession of splendid passages equally enriched with philosophy and poetry, tracing the fictions of Eastern mythology to the immediate intercourse of the imagination with Nature, and to the habitual propensity in the human mind to endow the outward forms of being with life and conscious motion.4

1Works, XIX, 9. 2Ibid., XI, 88.
3Ibid. 4Ibid., XIX, 13.
While Wordsworth's weakness lies in the insufficiency of his imaginative powers, his strength lies in the depth and integrity of his moral feeling. Although the greatest poetry is produced only by a union of invention and feeling, it seems that in the modern period of "dissociated sensibility" depth of feeling is a more valuable asset for a poet than quickness of imagination.

Therefore, in spite of the weakness of Wordsworth's imaginative powers, he is still the greatest poet of his own age. In the *Lyrical Ballads*, he opens "a finer and deeper vein of thought and feeling than any poet in modern times has done or attempted."¹ The characters and events may be "trifling" but "the reflections are profound, according to the gravity and the aspiring pretensions of his mind."² Of *The Excursion*, Hazlitt says

> in power of intellect, in lofty conception, in the depth of feeling, at once simple and sublime, which pervades every part of it and which gives to every object an almost preternatural and preterhuman interest, this work has seldom been surpassed."³

The effect of Wordsworth's poetry is more significant, and more enduring than the effect of Scott's poetry. Scott writes poetry of the "imagination," but he is "very inferior . . . to Mr. Wordsworth in profound sentiment."⁴

There is no determinate impression left on the mind by reading his poetry. It has no results. The reader rises up from the perusal with new images and associations, but he remains the same man that he was before.⁵

¹Works, V, 156.   ²Ibid., XI, 87.  
³Ibid., XIX, 9.   ⁴Ibid., V, 155.  ⁵Ibid.
On those who can appreciate him, Wordsworth's poetry leaves "a mark behind them that never wears out."

For Wordsworth's achievement is a great one.

He has opened a new avenue to the human heart, has explored another secret haunt and nook of nature,...

Compared with his lines, Lord Byron's stanzas are but exaggerated commonplace, and Walter Scott's poetry, (not his prose) old wives fables.

Outside the context of his own time, Wordsworth must still be considered a great poet. His egotism necessarily makes him inferior to Shakespeare, but even so, Wordsworth is of sufficient stature to be compared with the greatest of all poets. Comparing Wordsworth and Shakespeare, Hazlitt says, "if ever two men were the antipodes of each other, they are so; and even this, we think is paying compliment enough to Mr. Wordsworth."

In spite of his literary stature, Wordsworth has only

1Works, XI, 90.

2Ibid., VIII, 45. There are several other passages on Wordsworth's depth of feeling and "humanity" which should also be included.

There is a lofty philosophic tone, a thoughtful humanity, infused into his pastoral vein. Remote from the passions and events of the great world, he has communicated interest and dignity to the primal movements of the heart of man. (Works, XI, 89.)

In a word, his poetry is founded on setting up an opposition between the natural and the artificial; between the spirit of humanity, and the spirit of fashion and the world! (Works, XI, 87.)

There is in his general sentiments and reflections on human life a depth, an originality, a truth, a beauty, and grandeur, both of conception and expression, which place him decidedly at the head of the poets of the present day. (Works, XIX, 11.)

3Ibid., XVI, 253.
a small audience. In the first place, the inventive aspects of his poetry are too tame and dull to reach a general public: the poet has conscientiously avoided "all that can raise the imagination or affect the passions."\(^1\) Therefore, only those who have shared Wordsworth's experiences in nature can respond to the objects of the poet's invention, for only they habitually react to the lonely birds, flowers, and drab human beings typical of Wordsworth's poetry.\(^2\) "The author has created . . . an interest in the heart of the retired and lonely student of nature which can never die."\(^3\) But since most men respond only to obvious grandeur and power in nature and in man, they are baffled when confronted by a single daisy, and charge the poet with having produced "mere nonsense verses."\(^4\)

Wordsworth's audience is also limited by the obscurity of his poetry.

The extreme simplicity which some persons have objected to in Mr. Wordsworth's poetry is to be found only in the subject and the style: the sentiments are subtle and profound. In the latter respect, his poetry is as much above the common standard or capacity, as in the other it is below it.\(^5\)

The subjects are dull, the associations connected with them private, the expression of the ideas too subtle or difficult to find. The Excursion "affects a system without having any intelligible clue to one."\(^6\) Clarity is not enhanced by the

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\(^1\) *Works*, XIX, 12.  
\(^3\) *Ibid.*  
fact that in this poem, "all is left loose and irregular in the rude chaos of aboriginal nature."\textsuperscript{1} The illustrative examples which Wordsworth uses to give concrete embodiment to a point he wishes to make are frequently only confusing. The reader is thrown back upon himself as he attempts to solve the puzzle. Of the particular illustrations in \textit{The Excursion}, Hazlitt says:

It is only by an extreme process of abstraction that it is often possible to trace the operation of the general law in the particular illustration, yet it is to supply the defect of abstraction that the illustration is given.\textsuperscript{2}

Thus, Wordsworth can neither be read by the "vulgar" nor by the learned "who see all things through books."\textsuperscript{3} The one do not read him, the other do not understand him. Wordsworth may be despised by the great, and ridiculed by the fashionable. He must be content with a small, elite audience.

He has probably realized Milton's wish, --'and fit audience found, though few;" but we suspect he is not reconciled to the alternative. There are delightful passages in \textit{THE EXCURSION}, both of natural description and of inspired reflection . . . but we must add, in justice and in sincerity, that we think it impossible that this work should ever become popular.\textsuperscript{4}

\textbf{Shelley}

Wordsworth offered a clear example of a poet in whom the moral sentiment obscured, and in a sense repressed the creative faculty. Shelley, like Wordsworth, is without doubt a disciple of the modern school of poetry and philosophy—

\textsuperscript{1}Works, XIX, 9. \textsuperscript{2}Ibid., p. 12. \textsuperscript{3}Ibid., XI, 89. \textsuperscript{4}Ibid., XIX, 91.
apostle of revolution to say the least. But his mind is
different from Wordsworth's. He has intellectualized
his revolutionary principles. And though he has imagina-
tive genius, it is completely uncontrolled. The "uncontrol-
able violence" of Shelley's temperament gave to his creative
endeavors "a forced and false direction."\(^1\)

Shelley's predominant enthusiasm was for new ideas,
governments, customs, forms. His was a zest for paradox it-
self. His enthusiasm is described as "a species of madness."\(^2\)

We wish to speak of the errors of a man of genius with
tenderness. His nature was kind, and his sentiments
noble; but in him the rage of free inquiry and private
judgment amounted to a species of madness. Whatever
was new, untried, unheard of, ... exerted a kind of
fascination over his mind. ... Every paradox was to
him a self-evident truth; every prejudice an undoubted
absurdity.\(^3\)

This fixation affects Shelley's creative powers in somewhat
the same ways that Wordsworth's deep moral sentiment affected
his. The effect in Shelley is probably the more serious one,
for it results in cutting the poet almost completely away from
sense experience. Therefore, Shelley will not, or cannot sub-
mit to the authority of nature. As said before, the genuine
poet of "imagination" unites a profound passion (which is
sometimes an identifying sympathy) with the objects of his
sense experience. But Shelley, in his determination to seek
goodness and truth through radical and paradoxical ideas
only, becomes all moral passion, combined with little or no
sense experience whatever.

\(^{1}\) *Works*, XVI, 266.  
He mistook the nature of the poet's calling, which should be guided by involuntary, not by voluntary impulses. He shook off, as an heroic and praiseworthy act, the trammels of sense, custom, and sympathy, and became the creature of his own will.¹

Hazlitt does not seem to feel that it is all-consuming egotism which cuts Shelley off from the experience necessary to the poet, but instead "levity," "vanity," and "carelessness." In him, "fancy, will, caprice, predominated over and absorbed the natural influences of things."²

Having thus severed himself from empirical reality, Shelley, with his love for things intellectual, comes to resemble the scholastic philosopher who delights in building a system on a mere private whim or fancy.

He had no respect for any poetry that did not strain the intellect as well as fire the imagination—and was not sublimed into a high spirit of metaphysical philosophy.³

And thus, Shelley applies "reason" or "understanding" in areas where it is least adequate, that is the area of human experience in which the primary interest is "moral," not "mathematical."

He makes no account of the opinions of others, or the consequences of any of his own; but proceeds—tasking his reason to the utmost to account for everything, and discarding everything as mystery and error for which he cannot account by an effort of mere intelligence—measuring man, providence, nature, and even his own heart, by the limits of the understanding.⁴

Shelley, like most other poets of the modern school, has no genuine feeling for his audience. Actually, only the poet who concerns himself with human nature as a source of

¹ Works, XVI, 265. ² Ibid. ³ Ibid. ⁴ Ibid., p. 269.
inspiration is also capable of directing his work to the human nature of his readers. Shelley's poetry frequently has a didactic purpose, but it frightens away those whom it would teach. For, "he had no deference for the opinions of others, too little sympathy for their feelings." From reading Shelley's poetry, it would seem that the poet "wished not so much to convince or inform as to shock the public by the tenor of his productions." The combined result of madness, single-mindedness, levity with regard to experience, and indifference to human nature, cannot help but produce an inadequate poetry.

Shelley's "levity" with regard to experience makes the subjects of his poetry difficult to grasp. Wordsworth's thoughts were his subject, but even so these thoughts were grounded upon his private experience of external nature. Shelley's poetry is more dangerously intellectual. "Poetry, we grant, creates a world of its own; but it creates it out of existing materials. Mr. Shelley is the maker of his own poetry--out of nothing." "Spurning the world of realities, he rushed into the world of nonentities and contingencies, like air into a vacuum." For the most part, Shelley's poems are merely "a confused embodying of vague abstractions."

Instead of giving a language to thought, or lending the heart a tongue, he utters dark sayings, and deals in allegories and riddles. His Muse offers her services to clothe shadowy doubts and inscrutable

1Works, XVI, 267. 2Ibid., VIII, 149.
3Ibid., XVI, 265. 4Ibid., p. 268. 5Ibid., p. 265.
difficulties in a robe of glittering words, and to turn nature into a brilliant paradox.¹

Therefore, The Triumph of Life is "filmy, enigmatical, discontinuous, unsubstantial."² The purport of The Witch of Atlas is "perplexing and undefined";³ it seems "a sort of mental voyage through the unexplored regions of space and time."⁴ In general,

[Shelley's poems]⁵ abound in horrible imaginings, like records of a ghastly dream;—life, death, genius, beauty, victory, earth, air, ocean . . . are huddled together in a strange and hurried dance of words, and all that appears clear is the passion and paroxysm of thought in the poet's spirit.⁶

It is as impossible to grasp the poet's thoughts and feelings, at times, as it is to grasp the object about which the thought and feeling is centered. In Julian and Maddalo, thought is obscured by an excess of feeling.

The depth and tenderness of his feelings seems often to have interfered with the expression of them, as the sight becomes blind with tears. A dull, waterish vapour, clouds the aspect of his philosophical poetry.⁶

The imagery of Julian and Maddalo is also vague. A reader's perceptions of external objects are hardly sharpened after having examined Shelley's "pictures." For Shelley's sensi-
tivity to color is uncontrolled by the impulse toward organi-
ization or form.

It appears to us, that in some poets, as well as in some painters, the organ of colour . . . predominates over that of form; and Mr. Shelley is of the number. We have everywhere a profusion of dazzling hues, of glancing splendours, of floating shadows, but the ob-
jects on which they fall are bare, indistinct, and wild.⁷

¹Works, XVI, 265. ²Ibid., p. 274. ³Ibid. ⁴Ibid.
Shelley presents his imagery in far too complex a manner, and Hazlitt objects to what he calls both the complexity and the mysticism of *The Witch of Atlas*. Frequently, Shelley's images are repellent. At times, Shelley seems to wish to disgust and confound rather than to communicate and please. Hazlitt quotes some lines from *A Dirge*, and follows them with his own whimsical comment.

The 'worms' in this stanza are the old and traditional appendages of the grave;--the 'rats' are new and unwelcome intruders; but a modern artist would rather shock, and be disgusting and extravagant, than produce no effect at all.¹

Thus, Shelley's "imagination" produced only the extravagant, the mystical, the bizarre, the morbid. It would not have done so had the poet had the sort of mind which could chain his "imagination" to concrete experience. But instead, Shelley's "imagination" was forced to submit to an "uncontrollable violence" of temperament, and even worse, to a philosophy which seeks reality, not on earth, but in the clouds.

Hazlitt's criticism of Shelley for "spurning the world of realities" and rushing "into the world of nonentities and contingencies like air into a vacuum" brings to mind the similarity of Keats' critical philosophy to that of Hazlitt; and it recalls the famous letter in which Keats admonishes Shelley to unfurl his wings, to "curb your magnanimity and be more of an artist, and load every rift of your

¹*Works*, XVI, 279.
subject with ore. This admonition to "load every rift with ore" stems from Keats' Hazlittean judgment of Shelley's poetry as being insufficiently concrete, insufficiently tied to the reality of experience. And Keats (again, Hazlitt-like) explicitly attributes this insufficient concreteness to Shelley's "magnanimity," that is, Shelley's willful attempt to force reality to fit a private ideal, his refusal to submit to the discipline of the actual. Keats says in his letter to Shelley,

I received a copy of the Cenci. . . . There is only one part of it I am judge of—the Poetry and dramatic effect, which by many spirits now-a-days is considered the Mammon. A modern work, it is said, must have a purpose, which may be the God. An artist must serve Mammon.

Shelley's intrusion of a purpose, a private personality between himself and nature might be said to cause his work to lack, in Hazlitt's terms, "sympathetic imagination";—in Keats' terms "negative capability."³

³Hazlitt's conception of the "sympathetic imagination" and Keats' conception of "negative capability" coincide on many points, which can be briefly noted. The mutual basis of both concepts is the romantic conception of the "imagination" as a faculty capable of grasping the concrete, dynamic, inner reality of nature by means of sympathetic projection and the intuitive processes of association. (Cf. W. J. Bate, Negative Capability, Harvard Honors Theses in English; Cambridge: Harvard University Press: 1939, pp. 11-24.) Hazlitt and Keats' mutual condemnation of Shelley's "private judgment" is one example of their common emphasis on the importance of the poet's self-annihilation in his object—an annihilation which results in an acceptance of life and nature as they are, leaving no room for speculations or foregone conclusions about the nature of things. Thus the poet of "sympathetic imagination" or "negative capability" must also accept the suffering and
the evil in man, society, and nature. (There is nothing in Hazlitt exactly analogous to Keats' "vale of soul-making" concept. However, Hazlitt insists that the poet must come to grips with "the sharp calamities," "the sordid details of human life," not slurring over the miseries of the world as Thomas Moore and Thomas Campbell do, for example. /Works, XVI, 413,/) One must also recall Hazlitt's comment that Southey had not the "fortitude of mind" to acknowledge that evil is "inseparable from the nature of things." /Ibid., XI, 79,/) Once evil has been accepted by the great poet, and incorporated into his poetry, its presence does not preclude the simultaneous presence of the ideal. The fusion of evil with the ideal, as a matter of fact, is one of the most significant signs of a "sympathetic imagination" or of a "negative capability" at work. Hazlitt says in his lecture, "On Poetry in General," that "the tragedy of Shakespeare, which is true poetry . . . abstracts evil from itself by combining it with all the forms of the imagination, and with the deepest workings of the heart." (Works, V, 6.) W. J. Bate quotes a similar statement from Keats' letters: "The excellence of every art . . . is its intensity, capable of making all disagreeables evaporate from their being in close relationship with Beauty and Truth." (Bate, Negative Capability, p. 49.)

The poet of "sympathetic imagination" and of "negative capability" can both "enter into the soul" of a subject, so that "the poet is the object, and the force at work within the object is also at work within him." (Ibid., p. 59.) Once captured, the truth of the natural object contains the means, or is the means of its own expression. However, there is a difference in emphasis, if nothing more, in Hazlitt and Keats' notions of the worthiness of the subjects to be entered into by the poet. Bate points to Keats' "insistence upon the impartiality and indiscriminate acceptance of the poet" of any subject, "whether a creature or a phenomenon." (Ibid., pp. 32-33.) Although Keats may have believed that the highest sympathy is for "the living human being" (Ibid., p. 67.) he still exhibits an interest in the lower forms of life, and even in the inanimate, which Hazlitt simply does not share. It would be hard to imagine Hazlitt caring, as Keats did, about the "identity of a sparrow" or "the force at work within a billiard ball." (Among many other comments of the same kind, Hazlitt's adverse criticism of Wordsworth's concern with the simple daisy shows that he does not believe all natural objects to be equally endowed with poetic power, so that all natural objects are not even fit subjects for poetry.) Hazlitt's primary concern is with a poet's ability to sympathise with human passion. Shakespeare could sympathise with the strong passions of individuals; Milton and Chaucer could sympathise with the effect of nature on the passions and the habitual feelings of men in general; but there is no poet of "sympathetic imagination" who is praised primarily for his
Hazlitt finds Coleridge's mind and work almost too mysterious to account for. The influences shaping his mind are so many, for example, that it is impossible to settle with definiteness on any one or two. Like Wordsworth and Shelley, Coleridge was, in his youth, strongly influenced by the French Revolution, and the philosophy arising from it. He is unlike them in being equally influenced by German metaphysics, and even more unlike them in not really being a disciple of anything.

Our author's mind is . . . tangential. There is no subject on which he has not touched, none on which he has rested. With an understanding fertile, subtle, expansive . . . few traces of it will perhaps remain. He lends himself to all impressions alike; he gives up his mind and liberty of thought to none.  

Perhaps it is because Coleridge could submit to no authority at all that he must be the man of "perhaps the greatest ability now living" and also the man "who has not only done the least, but who is actually incapable of ever doing anything worthy of him."  But Hazlitt makes little attempt to explain why Coleridge's mind is what it is, or why Coleridge's sympathy with inert phenomena. The "imagination" remains, for Hazlitt, an "aristocratical" faculty. I do not believe this was necessarily so for Keats. This difference concerning the subjects of poetry may point to a very basic difference, then. According to Bate, the essence of "negative capability" is an acceptance of the concrete particular. (Ibid., p. 66.) And Keats' poetic practice indicates that the concrete particulars of the phenomenal world are, to an extent, important in and for themselves. If one were to define the essence of Hazlitt's "sympathetic imagination," however, one would have to say that it consists in an acceptance of man, and of human passion, in the light of which alone, the phenomenal world is important.

1Works, XI, 29.  2Ibid., XII, 198.
work is what it is. There is a noting of effects alone.

Like Shelley, Coleridge refuses to be tied down to solid realities—at least, any more than he can help; and he is forever floating off into his own dream world. The fault lies partially with his temperamental levity and vanity. "Mr. Coleridge . . . has no principle but that of being governed entirely by his own caprice, indolence, or vanity." Hazlitt uses similar words in speaking of Shelley, in whom "fancy, will, caprice, predominated over and absorbed the natural influences of things." Coleridge and Shelley also share a love of metaphysical speculation founded only upon private fancies rather than upon experience of nature. Whereas Shelley was absorbed in the philosophy of rationalism, Coleridge was delighted by German transcendental theories. "Coleridge's fancy gave the cue to his judgment, and his vanity set his invention afloat." "In writing verse, he is trying to subject the Muse to transcendental theories." The following passage contains a summary of Hazlitt's analysis of Coleridge's mind.

The general character of Mr. Coleridge's intellect, is a restless and yet listless dissipation, that yields to every impulse, and is stopped by every obstacle; an indifference to the greatest trifles, or the most important truths: or rather, a preference of the vapid to the solid, of the possible to the actual, or the impossible to both; of theory to practice, of contradiction to reason, and of absurdity to common sense.

Hazlitt's discussion of Coleridge's greatest poetry

\[\text{Works, XVI, 102.} \quad \text{Ibid., p. 265.} \quad \text{Ibid., XVII, 29.} \quad \text{Ibid., XI, 30.} \quad \text{Ibid., XVI, 102.}\]
is inept. He cannot exactly explain what he finds to admire or to blame in *The Ancient Mariner*, *Kubla Khan*, and *Cristabel*. Hazlitt cannot begin to deal with the first two. In *The Ancient Mariner*, Coleridge seems to "conceive of poetry but as a drunken dream, reckless, careless, and heedless of past, present, and to come."¹ But *The Ancient Mariner* is still a great poem, "unquestionably a work of genius--of wild, irregular, over-whelming imagination."² *Kubla Khan* "is not a poem, but a musical composition."³ The effect of both poems is powerful, but there is no reason, in Hazlitt's terms, why it should be.

Hazlitt has more to say about *Cristabel* than he does about these first two, but he does not explain why "the mind in reading it is spellbound."⁴ He points out one or two reasons, on the contrary, why the poem should have a negative effect on the mind, or no effect at all. The story itself is "dim" and "obscure."⁵ Its characters have little or no reality: "The sorceress seems to act without power--Cristabel to yield without resistance."⁶ A reader cannot respond to a


⁴*Ibid.*, p. 33. None of Hazlitt's opinions on *Cristabel* quoted here come from the *Cristabel* review of disputed authorship which appeared in the *Edinburgh Review*. Although A. R. Waller and Arnold Glover include the review in their edition of Hazlitt's works (*The Collected Works of William Hazlitt*, edited by A. R. Waller and Arnold Glover /12 Vols; London: J. M. Dent and Co., 1902/7, XI, 580-82.), the review is excluded altogether by P. P. Howe. Elisabeth Schneider argues convincingly that the review was not by Hazlitt, and suggests that Thomas Moore was its author. See Elisabeth Schneider, "The Unknown Reviewer of *Cristabel*: Jeffrey, Hazlitt, Tom Moore," *PMLA*, LXX (June, 1955), 417-433.

poem which offers merely a vague sense of plot and character. In addition, Coleridge seems to be attempting to estrange his audience consciously. He outrages the reader's feelings early in the poem with the unpleasant image of the "toothless" "mastiff bitch."¹ And he willfully mystifies his readers by omitting a line absolutely necessary to the understanding of the whole story.²

On the positive side, Hazlitt finds much beauty in Cristabel, of "thought, imagery, and versification."³ And there is "one genuine outburst of humanity,"⁴ "one splendid passage on divided friendship"⁵ which Hazlitt points out several times in different essays. He is most explicit in "The Living Poets" where he mentions "one fine passage . . . which contains the description of the quarrel between Sir Leoline and Sir Roland de Vaux of Tryermaine."⁶

That Hazlitt singles out this passage from Cristabel as a favorite is indicative of the characteristic bent of his mind. The supernatural, the mystical, do not accord with Hazlitt's fundamental realism, his concern with direct experience of nature. A description of the pangs of divided friendship, on the other hand, does provide Hazlitt with what he seeks in poetry, knowledge of human nature. When he cannot find in a poem what he considers to be an attempt to express some aspect of human truth, he cannot criticize the poem at all. He could not find this attempt in The Ancient

¹ Works, XIX, 32. ² Ibid., p. 33. ³ Ibid., XVI, 33. ⁴ Ibid., p. 34. ⁵ Ibid., XI, 35. ⁶ Ibid., V, 166.
Mariner and Kubla Khan, although he found in both an incredible power. Of such poetry alone, Hazlitt might be said to have been forced to make an "impressionist" judgment.

As a writer of tragedy, Coleridge has followed the example of the Germans, and it is here more than as a writer of the lyric that Hazlitt sees Coleridge most clearly as a typical product of contemporary trends. In modern times, Hazlitt considers good tragedy to be an impossibility.

In a word, we hold for a truth, that a thoroughly good tragedy is an impossibility in a state of manners and literature where the poet and philosopher have got the better of the man; where the reality does not mould the imagination, but the imagination glosses over the reality; and where the unexpected stroke of true calamity . . . is blunted, sheathed, and lost, amidst the flowers of poetry strewn over unreal, unfelt distress, and the flimsy topics of artificial humanity prepared beforehand for all occasions.¹

Still, tragedy is alive in the present day—"roused from its trance by the blast of the French Revolution, and by the loud trampling of the German Pegasus on the English stage."² This live modern tragedy is "tragedy of paradox." Its authors seek only violent effect, and they succeed in their aim, "startling the hearer by overturning all the established maxims of society."³ Hazlitt describes the German tragedy as the concluding stage in the development (or decline) of tragic drama.

The fourth and last is the German or paradoxical style, which differs from the others in representing men as acting not from the impulse of feeling, or as debating common-place questions of morality, but as the organs and mouth-pieces . . . of certain extravagant

¹Works, V, 305. ²Ibid., VI, 359. ³Ibid., p. 360.
speculative opinions, abstracted from all existing customs, prejudices and institutions.\textsuperscript{1}

Hazlitt considers Coleridge one of the foremost English writers of tragedy in the German, paradoxical style. His failures are the typical ones which Hazlitt ascribes to the whole school.

We may say of Coleridge what he has said of Mr. Maturin, that he is of the transcendental German school. He is a florid poet, and an ingenious metaphysician, who mistakes scholastic speculations for the intricate windings of the passions, and assigns possible reasons instead of actual motives for the excesses of his characters. He gives us studied special-pleadings for involuntary bursts of feeling, and the needless strain of tinkling sentiments for the point-blank language of nature. His Remorse is a spurious tragedy. Take the following passage, and then ask, whether the charge of sophistry and paradox, and dangerous morality, to startle the audience, in lieu of more legitimate methods of exciting their sympathy, which he brings against the author of Bertram, may not be retorted on his own head.\textsuperscript{2}

Here Hazlitt can focus upon a false or inadequate view of human character, with the accompanying falseness and inappropriateness of the dialogue. The ideas that are expressed shock and repel, and this, of course, produces an effect directly opposite to the ideal one produced by tragedy—the cultivation of sympathy in an audience by means of giving them knowledge of humanity. Once again, Hazlitt finds that a union of the detached logical reason with uncontrollable violence of feeling affords neither truth, nor compelling sympathy, nor beauty.

\textsuperscript{1}Works, VI, 347.  \textsuperscript{2}Ibid., XVIII, 309.
Lord Byron

Lord Byron's contributions to the "poetry of wit" and the "poetry of commonplaces" have already been discussed. But if Lord Byron's mind and art were not pure products of the "spirit of the age," still his essential qualities link him and his poetry with the greatest and most original literary work of his time, which found its expression in "the poetry of paradox."

In Hazlitt's discussion of Byron's mental and spiritual make-up, there is naturally a great deal about the poet's egocentricity, his haughtiness, pride, and self-pity. "He holds no communion with his kind; but stands alone, without mate or fellow."¹ "He scorns all things, even himself."² And Byron's self-pity is colossal: Hazlitt says sarcastically, "'He has tasted all earth's bliss, both living and loving,' and therefore he describes himself as suffering the tortures of the damned."³ The poet's selfishness is all pervasive. "He exists not by sympathy, but by antipathy."⁴ Byron perfectly fits Hazlitt's general description of the modern poet who sees only himself and the universe. He is shut up in the "Bastile of his own ruling passions,"⁵ Byron, even more than Wordsworth, has a mind which is the direct opposite of the mind whose guiding faculty is the "sympathetic imagination."

Like that of every other modern poet, Byron's representation of nature is distorted by self-absorption. The one

1Works, XI, 69. ²Ibid. ³Ibid., XIX, 36.
4Ibid., XI, 69. ⁵Ibid., p. 71.
significant object in the universe is Lord Byron himself; "Lord Byron would persuade us that the universe itself is not worth his or our notice; and yet he would expect us to be occupied with him."\(^1\) External nature is clouded by the veil of the poet's ego.

Lord Byron's poetry, in its irregular and gloomy magnificence, we fear, antedates its own doom; and is buried in a desolation of its own creating, where the mists of fancy cloud, instead of lighting up the face of nature; and the fierceness of the passions, like the Sirocco of the Desert, withers and consumes the heart.\(^2\)

On the whole, Hazlitt considers Byron's powers "better suited to express the human passions than to reflect the forms of nature."\(^3\) However, there are some of nature's forms with which Byron is successful because they naturally reflect his tempestuous disposition—"the self-willed, untamed mighty world of waters,"\(^4\) "the dark and glittering ocean," "the frail bark hurrying before the storm."\(^5\)

Hazlitt describes Byron's serious poetry as a mixture of the "poetry of paradox" and the "poetry of commonplace." Byron's subjects are frequently commonplace.

Lord Byron does not exhibit a new view of nature, or raise insignificant objects into importance by the romantic associations with which he surrounds them; but generally . . . takes common-place thoughts and events, and endeavors to express them in stronger and statelier languages than others.\(^6\)

We have as good as hinted, that his Lordship's poetry consists mostly of . . . superb common-places; even his paradoxes are common-place. They are familiar in the schools: they are only new and striking in

\(^{1}\)Works, XIX, 36.  \(^{2}\)Ibid., pp. 41-42.  \(^{3}\)Ibid., p. 40.  
\(^{4}\)Ibid., p. 43.  \(^{5}\)Ibid., V, 153.  \(^{6}\)Ibid., XI, 73.
his dramas and stanzas, by being out of place.\footnote{Works, XI, 76.} Byron's treatment of character may be typical of either poetic type. In creating characters reflecting his own personality Byron provides examples of the "poetry of paradox." Rousseau's characters were "modifications of his own being, reflections and shadows of himself."\footnote{Ibid., IV, 89.} Likewise, Lord Byron makes man after his own image, woman after his own heart; the one is a capricious tyrant, the other a yielding slave; he gives us the misanthrope and the voluptuary by turns; and with these two characters . . . he makes out everlasting centos of himself.\footnote{Ibid., XI, 71.}

If Byron represents a personality other than his own, it is necessarily a commonplace picture, lacking in individuality.

It is not merely the fashion among philosophers—the poets also have got into a way of scouting individuality as beneath the sublimity of their pretensions, and the universality of their genius. . . . By leaving out the individual, they become common-place. They cannot reason, and they must declaim. Modern tragedy . . . is converted into a handsomely constructed steamboat, that is moved by the sole expansive power of words. Lord Byron has launched several of these ventures lately.\footnote{Ibid., XII, 53.}

In his scorn for his audience, Byron belongs to the modern, "paradoxical" school of poets. Like Wordsworth, Coleridge and Shelley, Byron does not even attempt to have a universal appeal. "Lord Byron, who in his politics is a liberal, in his genius is haughty and aristocratic."\footnote{Ibid., XI, 70-71.} At times, he seeks to shock his audience with paradoxes which go "to the very edge of extreme and licentious speculation."\footnote{Ibid., p76.}
Other times, he seeks to produce only a meaningless excitement to preserve himself, and possibly his readers from ennui. Finally, the limitations of Byron's subject, and his attitude toward that subject, limit whatever audience he has.

Lord Byron's severer verse is enshrined in the breasts of those whose gaiety has been turned to gall, whose fair exterior has a canker within, whose mirth has received a rebuke as it were folly, from whom happiness has fled like a dream.

Hazlitt analyzes Childe Harold's Pilgrimage, Canto IV as a mixture of the "poetry of commonplaces" with the "poetry of paradox." Although Byron has chosen grand events and scenes for his subjects, the triteness of his approach makes them commonplace and lacking in effect. "His Childe Harold contains a lofty and impassioned review of the great events of history . . . but he dwells chiefly on what is familiar to the mind of every schoolboy." In addition, the thoughts and reflections are "with all their extravagance of expression, commonplace." In keeping with the "revolutionary" practices of the modern school, Byron ignores "all the received rules of composition" in this poem. There is "no plot, no story, no interest excited, no catastrophe." And in technical matters, everything is garbled and topsy-turvy.

The versification and style of this poem are as perverse and capricious as the method or the sentiments.

1 Works, XI, 72. 2 Ibid., XVI, 412. 3 Ibid., XI, 73. 4 Ibid., XIX, 36. 5 Ibid.
One stanza perpetually runs on into the next, making the exception the rule, merely because it properly ends in itself; and there is a strange mixture of stately phraseology and farfetched metaphor, with the most affected ... simplicity of expression and uncouthness in the rhymes.¹

Since most of Hazlitt's discussion of Byron's poetry as representative of the "poetry of paradox" is devoted to explaining the literary weaknesses resulting from Byron's self-centered passions (which are likened to a "cancer, eating into the heart of poetry"²), it perhaps seems a willful distortion of Hazlitt's criticism to say that Hazlitt also considered Byron's passion his strength. I do not believe it is a real distortion, however, and since the greatest emphasis in this chapter has been upon the evils of egocentricity, it is important to emphasize that in Hazlitt's view a modern writer may derive his greatness from what is, in the overall historical scheme, his greatest fault.

It has already been pointed out, that in Hazlitt's theory the greatest poetry results from the union of "richness of invention with depth of feeling"—in other words, from the action of the "sympathetic imagination." But Hazlitt also believes that in the modern period—a phenomenon comparable to T. S. Eliot's conception of the "dissociation of sensibility" becomes prominent—in which either a poet's emotion in the creative process outweighs his inventive capacity (which is the case in the "poetry of paradox"); or in which "invention," and thus "fancy," outweighs the element

of feeling (which is the case with the "poetry of fancy" in the modern period).

Within the framework of modern poetry, the poetry dominated by emotion is usually superior to the poetry dominated by invention. Hazlitt's moral concerns guide him in this preference. The introductory chapter on "reason" showed that in literature as in moral systems "what does not touch the heart, or come home to the feelings, goes comparatively for little or nothing." And one who has not "felt" cannot touch the hearts of others. Also, in his discussion of Rousseau and Wordsworth, Hazlitt (although always remarking the limitations of subjectivity) still points out the full value of the "feeling" of the one, and the "profound sentiment" of the other. Both owe their power, originality, and influence over human beings to the strength of their subjective emotions.

[Rousseau's] interest in his own thoughts and feelings was always wound up to the highest pitch; and hence the enthusiasm which he excited in others. He owed the power which he exercised over the opinions of all Europe, by which he created numberless disciples, and overturned established systems, to the tyranny which his feelings, in the first instance, exercised over himself.

Of Wordsworth, Hazlitt says: "He is the greatest, that is, the most original poet of the present day, only because he is the greatest egotist." Also, it was pointed out in an earlier part of this chapter, that Wordsworth's depth of feeling was superior to Sir Walter Scott's picturesqueness, for one

1Works, XII, 50. 2Ibid., IV, 89. 3Ibid., VIII, 44.
"opened a new avenue to the human heart" while the other had "no effect, no results whatever."¹

The essay, or fragment of an essay, which best represents Hazlitt's positive judgment of Byron's genius is "On Moore and Byron." Here, he characterizes and (perhaps indirectly) judges the two poets and their poetry according to the faculty most characteristic of each.

The poetry of Moore is essentially that of Fancy; the poetry of Byron that of Passion. If there is passion in the effusions of one, the fancy by which it is expressed predominates over it: if fancy is called to the aid of the other, it is still subservient to the passion.²

"Fancy" is inferior even to subjective "passion" in the same way it is inferior to the "sympathetic imagination." For "fancy," particularly when allied primarily with "sense" is inadequate to deal with the problems of human life, or to have appeal to human feeling. Moore's poetry "glitters to the sense through an atmosphere of indifference."³ His poetry is insignificant, for it has no effect, dramatic or otherwise. "Our indolent, luxurious bard does not whet the appetite by setting us to hunt after the game of human passion, and is therefore obliged to pamper us with dainties."⁴ Moore simply does not deal with "the sharp calamities and sordid details of human life."⁵ Instead, he chooses objects that are "beautiful or dazzling in themselves,"⁶ appealing too exclusively to the "flattering support of sense and

¹Works, VIII, 45. ²Ibid., XVI, 412. ³Ibid., p. 413. ⁴Ibid. ⁵Ibid., p. 413. ⁶Ibid., p. 414.
fancy."¹ The result is "superficial and wearisome."² Byron, on the other hand, deals, if sporadically and inadequately, with the problems of humanity. And it is humanity, and particularly the individual human being, which constitutes the proper—the only true subject matter—of poetry. Therefore, in Hazlitt's view, an appeal to "sense and fancy" alone is as inadequate as an appeal to "reason" alone, for both bypass the true poet's (and moralist's) central concern, human nature and the human heart.

I place the heart in the centre of my moral system, and the senses and the understanding are its two extremities. You [a "rationalist"] leave nothing but gross, material objects as the ends of pursuit, and the dry, formal calculations of the understanding as the means of ensuring them. Is this enough? Is man a mere animal, or a mere machine for philosophical experiments?³

In this essential matter, Byron is the superior poet, for Byron deals with the agony of a human soul, even if that soul happens to be Byron's own. In Byron's poetry one hears "the shrieks of a human voice"; in Moore's poetry the human voice is stifled in "flowers and verdure."⁴ Byron is apparently most genuine, and therefore most human and affecting, when he is most self-centered—and consequently Hazlitt finds Manfred superior among Byron's poems. In reference to Manfred Hazlitt says,

The more the writer indulged himself in following out the phantoms of a morbid sensibility, or lapt himself

¹Works, XVI, 414. ²Ibid. ³Ibid., XII, 193-94. ⁴Ibid., XVI, 413.
in the voluptuous dream of his own existence, the nearer he would approach to the truth of nature.  

Conclusion

It is perhaps more difficult to make general statements about the "poetry of paradox" than about any of the other historical categories of poetry identified by Hazlitt. Each poet of the modern period has a character unique and independent of the rest, the complete self-sufficiency of the literary Jacobins providing a true keynote.

To a limited degree, it is possible to say that the predominance of the logical "reason" accounts for the character and value of modern poetry. Shelley especially had little respect for poetry which did not strain the intellect, and his own poetry was "a confused embodying of vague abstractions." Wordsworth allowed his thoughts on revolution to determine his democratic, equalitarian, and therefore dull choice of subjects. Both Coleridge and Byron wrote dramas in which theoretical arguments took the place of representation of character. The result of this predominance of logical "reason" is, of course, that the poets do not capture the concrete truths of human personality; and, as has already been noted, the more abstract a poet's treatment of any subject, the less effect his poetry can have.

"Reason" alone, however, does not account for the nature of the modern "poetry of paradox." Hazlitt, as a matter of fact, criticizes some modern poets for not being

\[1\] Works, XIX, 44.
reasonable enough. Southey and Landor are criticized for their logical inconsistency. Coleridge is criticized for preferring "contradiction to reason." Even Shelley's poetry cannot be described adequately in terms of its abstract nature alone. Shelley's ungoverned, unchecked "imagination" produced the garish and bizarre imagery which accounts for much of the effect of his poetry. The unintelligibility of Coleridge's poems apparently results from the free exercise of a "wild, irregular, overwhelming imagination." If modern poetry is dull and uninteresting as a result of the abstract speculations governing its contents, the wild "imagination" of some modern poets renders their poetry either repugnant or utterly meaningless.

The most important psychological factor other than "reason" shaping the character of modern poetry is egocentric feeling. The force of Wordsworth's feelings narrowed his interests to subjects interesting only to him, and these subjects were frequently insignificant ones. The intensity of Wordsworth's feelings with regard to some objects interfered with his objectivity in depicting them. Excess of feeling also prevented Shelley from achieving clarity of expression.

Perhaps the most meaningful general statement one can make about the psychological character of the modern poet is that this character is an unbalanced one. According to Hazlitt, "wherever an intense activity is given to any one faculty, it necessarily prevents the due and natural exercise
of the others. 1 with the poets of "paradox," either "reason" or "feeling" acts too intensely, and prevents, especially, the "due and natural" exercise of "imagination."

The private nature of the "poetry of paradoxes" makes it inferior to the "poetry of imagination" and the "poetry of wit." The individuality enforced by the predominance of private "reason" and personal feeling makes the poetry of paradoxes deficient in truth and power. Not only do the poets of this school lack sympathetic imagination of the highest Shakespearean level; they lack the lower levels of poetic truth as well. There is an absence of imaginative sympathy with the universal experience of the grand and awe-inspiring such as Milton had; or with the more everyday universal experience of habitual impressions which Chaucer was able to capture. Such poetic truth as these poets were able to attain resides primarily in the depth of sincerity with which they expressed their private feelings. Thus only did they reveal the truths of the human heart. The "poetry of paradox" is also less moral than the "poetry of imagination" and the "poetry of wit." Its private nature, and its deficiencies in invention (brought about by the predominance of either "reason" or "feeling") limits the possibility of successful communication. And without successful communication, there can be no encouragement of sympathy, much less of benevolence.

The best "poetry of paradox" does fulfill the requirements of great poetry in a way not heretofore mentioned. And

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1 Works, XIX, 15.
that is, that unlike the "poetry of commonplaces" with its general failure in appeal, and unlike the "poetry of wit" which contains a minimum appeal to "feeling," and unlike some "poetry of fancy" with its appeal only to "sense," the "poetry of paradox" contains an appeal to the whole mind. Especially when Wordsworth's greatest poetry does reach an audience, it appeals to the intellect, the feelings, and the senses, although in a necessarily unbalanced way.
CHAPTER VII

CONCLUSION

The chief concern of this thesis has been to determine the extent to which Hazlitt's theory of psychological faculties formed a basis for his critical system. Before turning to a consideration of this relationship, however, it would be well to return briefly to the faculties themselves to note a few additions to the preliminary definitions of the first chapter.

It was anticipated that the faculties forming the psychological basis of Hazlitt's critical system might undergo some slight changes in definition as a result of an extended study of Hazlitt's application of them to literary questions. I believe the only preliminary definition which would require any significant additions (although not changes) is that of the "imagination." For Hazlitt supplements the romantic conception of the "imagination" outlined in the first chapter with older meanings of the term as well, the most important of which appearing in Hazlitt's criticism of Milton. There Hazlitt uses "imagination" in a neo-Longinian sense, as capable of grasping and responding to the grand, vague, and awe-inspiring sublimity of external nature.¹ As Hazlitt uses the

¹In his retention of this older view of the "imagination" Hazlitt is like Wordsworth and Coleridge. "Despite the sharp break with the 18th century which Wordsworth and Coleridge
romantic concept to define Shakespearean tragedy and to criticize, not only tragedy, but the dramatic elements in all kinds of literature (including the dramatic element of the periodical essay, for example), he applies the neo-Longinian concept to his criticism of the epic, and of the epic elements in literature—to praise the grand and awe-inspiring elements of Shakespearean tragedy, to blame the dull, drab, uninteresting subjects of Wordsworth's poetry. Another, less significant older meaning of "imagination" utilized occasionally by Hazlitt should also be noted. When not fused with passion at all, the "imagination" seems to degenerate in Hazlitt's criticism to its old status in the Lockean epistemology and to become untrustworthy and deceitful. The imaginative expression of a poet like Shelley reflects primarily a subjective, semi-insane interpretation of sense experience, and is described as "fictitious," "wild," and "morbid."

Hazlitt's applications of the term "fancy," particularly in his criticism of the fanciful poetry of the nineteenth century, add emphasis to an aspect of "fancy" which is suggested, but not developed in my preliminary discussion of the term. According to the discussion in the introduction, the essential quality of "fancy" perceives natural objects as beautiful—as they are endowed by passion and feeling. It was also pointed out that "fancy" frequently appears in conjunction with "wit."

believed themselves to be making and which tradition has credited them with making, their theory of poetic imagination was on its genetic side a continuation of 18th-century 'genius,' and, with regard to the content of poetry, it prescribed certain items inherited from the 18th-century reaction against metaphysical and neo-classic wit. These items were the 'sublime' and its components the emotive and the vague." (Wimsatt and Brooks, pp. 404-5.)
When it does, the essential perception of sensuous beauty remains, but the coldly intellectual aura of "wit" dispels the element of feeling. In the nineteenth century fanciful poetry, though, "fancy" is allied with sense. Again the fundamental sensuousness is present, but in this association with sense alone, "fancy" loses its ties with both feeling and intellect, and takes on more firmly connotations of sensuality, which were only hinted at in the preliminary discussion.

I do not find anything to add to Hazlitt's conception of "wit" as originally presented, or to indicate that Hazlitt's evaluation of it changes in his critical applications of the term. Hazlitt's conception of "reason" also remains the same, but his evaluation of "reason" is different according to the context in which it appears. Hazlitt's attitude toward "reason" is particularly ambiguous in regard to its appearance in works of the modern period. Hazlitt condemns "reason" for being too vague, abstract, and dull, on the one hand. And yet he prefers responsible "reason" to the irresponsible "imagination" which appears during this period.

Although it is necessary to bear in mind the additions mentioned above, it is still possible to conclude that the anticipated correspondence between the originally outlined "faculty psychology" and a critical system has been borne out by this thesis. The "imagination" as the dominant faculty gives rise to the highest literary expression; "wit," by nature of its intrinsic inferiority to the "imagination" gives rise to a lesser literary type; the predominance of "reason" accounts
in part for the inferiority of the "poetry of commonplaces" and the "poetry of paradoxes." In proportion as the truths of human nature become consistently less the concern of the poets of "wit" and "reason" the moral effect of their poetry becomes consistently weaker. The poet who cannot sympathise cannot produce sympathy.

However, the unanticipated made its appearance too. I did not anticipate, for example, that Hazlitt's attitude to some "poetry of fancy" would be more negative than his attitude to the "Poetry of wit" or the "poetry of commonplaces." Nor did I expect to find that Hazlitt would occasionally depart from his historical outline of English poetry. "Paradoxical" poetry (although not the true "poetry of paradox") appears as early as the Jacobean period, while a certain kind of fanciful poetry appears as late as modern times. Furthermore, Hazlitt's judgments do not rest altogether upon his evaluation of the faculties. The variations in value within the psychological types must be accounted for more exclusively in terms of variation in power or effect, for example; and one cannot say that Hazlitt's judgment of the "poetry of paradoxes" depends altogether upon the inferiority of "reason" as a poetic principle. As a matter of fact, the result of a careful consideration of the body of Hazlitt's critical statements is that the faculty psychology forms the most important part of his critical system, but cannot be used for a complete description of the whole.

The important fact remains, however, that Hazlitt has, and consistently uses a critical system with which to
characterize and evaluate literature. For the purposes of evaluation, this system has two primary points of reference: the poet, and the effect of the poem, the latter being for Hazlitt the final test of value. Hazlitt's conception of the poet "described in his ideal perfection" is one whose "whole soul has been brought into activity" in a perfect balance of aesthetic, moral, and intellectual qualities. Only the "imagination" can achieve the ideal fusion of "sense," "passion" (or feeling), and "thought." The operation of "wit" implies at least a suspension of feeling; that of "fancy" frequently implies a curtailment of the normal activity of both "feeling" and "thought." The predominance of "reason" prevents the full operation of both aesthetic and moral activity; while the predominance of "feeling" dwarfs the aesthetic as well as the intellectual powers of the mind. "Wherever an intense activity is given to any one faculty, it necessarily prevents the due and natural exercise of the others."

The psychological makeup of the poet, however, is ultimately of interest because it explains the degree to which a poet is capable of producing the moral effect of poetry—i.e., of arousing sympathy. Only the "whole man" can arouse the "whole man." And only the poet of "imagination" by virtue of his own sympathy, has sufficient access to universal truth (a truth incorporating the aesthetic values and powers of the universe) to write poetry which simultaneously appeals "to the sense, to the heart, and the intellect."

Since "wit" by degrees hardens the heart, even the greatest poets of "wit" know less of the universe of man and
nature because they sympathise with less. The "wit" may be acquainted with the universal faults and foibles of human nature, and can produce varying degrees of insight into these, according to the degree of his truthfulness and penetration.

Witty poetry is inferior to imaginative because it cultivates not sympathy with, but scorn for man and nature: The senses and the heart are here made sport of. Still, the "poetry of wit" does not encourage mere selfishness, and particularly the satirical poetry of "wit" is moral in effect because it leads to healthy self-criticism.

There is direct correspondence between the effeminate character and effeminate poetry. The poet of "fancy" may all too possibly allow the pleasures of sense to enervate his moral and intellectual faculties. And his consuming interest in sense experience inspires a poetry reflecting neither thought nor feeling. In the extreme form of "poetry of fancy" taken by the "poetry of sense and fancy" there is an appeal only to the sense. And Hazlitt's low evaluation of this modern variety of fanciful poetry rests upon his conclusion that its moral effect is actually negative. The exclusive appeal to sense has a tendency to stifle natural sympathy by stifling intellect and feeling. The dull reasonableness of the poet of "commonplaces" gives rise to an abstract and generalized picture of human character and the world of external nature. Its effect is apparently negligible, productive of neither harm nor good.

The intellectual and emotional egotism of the modern poet cuts him away from knowledge of man, and therefore of
what universally affects mankind. Thus, the narrow sympathies of the poet of "paradox" clearly contrast with the universal sympathy of the poet of "imagination."

Such a one is slow to admire anything that's admirable; feels no interest in what is most interesting to others, no grandeur in anything grand, no beauty in anything beautiful. He tolerates only what he himself creates; he sympathises only with what can enter into no competition with him. . . . He sees nothing but himself and the universe.  

These poets have neither the concrete knowledge of human beings necessary for the dramatist, nor access to the grand and awe-inspiring objects of sense perception necessary for creating epic effects. At its best, the "poetry of paradox" can provide, for a limited audience, an insight into the corner of reality which interests the poet; and to a limited degree, the poet of paradoxes may communicate and arouse an outer-directed thought and feeling.

Hazlitt's real evaluation of the types of poetry he enumerates in his essay "On Dryden and Pope" seems to be somewhat different from the one suggested there. The "poetry of imagination" and the "poetry of wit" would hold first and second place, for both have positive moral effects upon a general audience—effects different, however, both in degree and kind. The "poetry of paradoxes," having a positive effect upon a limited audience, would follow "the poetry of wit," leaving the "poetry of commonplaces" with its negligible effect in fourth place. It is rather difficult to determine just where to place the "poetry of fancy" as a single category. The best

\[1\text{Works, V, 163.}\]
poetry of fancy still belongs between the "poetry of imagination" and the "poetry of wit." However, the nineteenth century poetry of "sense and fancy" is obviously inferior to all five historical categories. The psychological character of the greatest poets of "paradox" is superior to that of the poets of "fancy" and of "reason." Particularly the element of genuine passion or feeling gives their work an originality and depth of insight which no poet of "commonplaces" possesses. And although "feeling" and "reason" in the modern poet are subjective in tendency, still the moral and intellectual aspirations of this group automatically place them above many poets of "fancy." (Hazlitt's vituperative and spiteful comments upon his contemporaries cannot be dismissed, perhaps; but the extreme harshness of some of his criticisms of them have emotional overtones which can not be explained in terms of literary ideas. Personal, or more usually, political enmities account for Hazlitt's more savage outbursts.)

I believe one can conclude from all this that the mental makeup of the highest kind still produces the highest kind of poetry, but that the identification of the poet's dominant creative faculty is not always sufficient evidence of what this makeup is. Therefore one cannot, by simply transferring Hazlitt's evaluation of a certain faculty to the type of poetry it inspires always accurately arrive at Hazlitt's judgment of the literary type, or work in question. "Fancy" and "reason" are particularly deceptive, for their value changes according to the company they do, or do not keep. The safest guide to Hazlitt's judgments would seem to be a knowledge, when possible,
both of Hazlitt's view of the whole psychological character of a poet, and his evaluation of a poet's characteristic effect.

Since Hazlitt's judgments rest so heavily on a poem's effect, his characterization and analysis of a poem is always made in terms of its potential power on a general audience. Hazlitt characterizes the component parts of a work separately, if not systematically, and although he does not say in so many words which component part is primary the reader can infer which one he considers to have chief eminence rather easily. The "parts" of literary works which Hazlitt usually brings under consideration are "subject," "character," "dialogue," "feeling," and "thought." The power of Shakespearean tragedy arises primarily from the dignity, force and concreteness with which the poet portrays individual human character and passion. The power of the Miltonic epic derives from the grandeur of its "subject," a word which may refer to the combined effect of "character," "event," and "imagery." At any rate, all the parts of *Paradise Lost* are so treated by Milton, according to Hazlitt's analysis, as to contribute to an awe-inspiring effect. Samuel Butler achieves his comic and satirical purposes chiefly through the element of diction and imagery. However, the thought is the significant formative element in this instance. Hazlitt finds that Butler's didactic purpose (involving the general attitude of "wit") distorts the dramatic elements of the poem—that is, the characters, and the thoughts and feelings they express in the dialogue. The powerlessness of the "poetry of commonplaces" is the result.
of the predominating bombastic dialogue. The concrete depiction of a suffering human being has power; but a discussion, and a vague one at that, of human passion, fails to be particularly arresting. At times, Hazlitt makes no attempt to describe a work by explaining the effect of its various parts, and he may be satisfied to evoke the effect of an unanalyzed whole. For example, he makes the following remark on the works of Beaumont and Fletcher, which conveys only the most general idea of the power or effect of these poets' work. This practice is not typical, however.

They are two goodly trees, the stateliest of the forest, crowned with blossoms, and with the verdure springing at their feet; but they do not strike their roots far enough into the ground, and the fruit can hardly ripen for the flowers!

Hazlitt's criticism of Wordsworth affords the most complete picture of his critical system as a whole. He makes use of the system more directly in connection with this poet than with any other, I think. Hazlitt offers a rather full analysis of Wordsworth's psyche, relating it to his poetic powers; and his final estimate of Wordsworth seems to result from his combined estimate of the Poet's mental makeup and his evaluation of the power of Wordsworth's poetry. Wordsworth's chief failure is defined in terms of his failure in poetic power. Emotional and intellectual egotism are the causes for this failure, for Wordsworth knows only so much of human nature as he knows of himself. Without knowledge of human beings, the poet cannot create affecting dramatic char-

\[\text{Works, VI, 249.}\]
acter, and Hazlitt comments on what he considers to be the
dull, drab, undifferentiated figures which inhabit Words-
worth's poems. Self-involvement prevents Wordsworth from
knowing what objects or subjects are universally interesting
and affecting. Wordsworth knows only of those things which
have affected his own emotions. Therefore,

he hardly ever avails himself of striking subjects or
remarkable combinations of events, but in general re-
jects them as interfering with the workings of his own
mind, as disturbing the smooth, deep, majestic current
of his own feelings.¹

Even the Wordsworthian imagery, which Hazlitt praises at times
for its truth and effect is obscured by clouds of personal
feeling and private recollection. Whatever power the Words-
worthian poem ultimately has must arise from what the poet
has been able to communicate of his personal feelings and
thoughts. As a result, Wordsworth must content himself with
a small audience whose experiences have coincided with his
own, and who can therefore respond to his interests.

Wordsworth's egotism and subjectivity, by dwarfing
the inventive aspects of his poetry prevent him from fully
achieving the moral effect of the "poetry of imagination"--
the cultivation of sympathy in a general audience. But the
depth and integrity of Wordsworth's thought and feeling entitle
him to be mentioned in the same breath with Shakespeare. And
Wordsworth's originality of insight, his sincerity of moral
impulse, arouse the sympathy and interest of a few, counter-
acting to a certain extent the mere frustration and boredom
which define the effect of his poetry upon the many.

¹Works, XIX, 10.
Rene Wellek discusses Hazlitt's concept of the "sympathetic imagination" and suggests that some of his critical attitudes can be explained by it. He finds no real synthesis, however.\(^1\) Walter Jackson Bate interprets Hazlitt as a critic whose standards of literary value can be inferred and made plainly articulate.\(^2\) According to Bate, Hazlitt's critical theory is based upon his conception of the truth of the perceptions of the "sympathetic imagination," and the corollary idea of the relative falsity of the perceptions guided by "reason" and subjective feeling. Since the aim of art, according to Bate's interpretation of Hazlitt, is to express "a heightened and perceptive grasp of objective reality," the literary values Hazlitt derives from his conception of the "sympathetic imagination" are concreteness and particularity, or "intense naturalistic expression."\(^3\) It is also pointed out that since "character" is the element in literature most expressive of human life, the aim of the highest art is the concrete representation of human character. From this point, one may derive the theoretical justification for Hazlitt's other critical judgments. Tragedy is the highest genre because of its objective truth to character; the lyric the lowest because it merely expresses subjective feeling. French tragedy is inferior to Elizabethan, French poetry inferior to English, because in character and imagery it is abstract, and thus, in tendency false.\(^4\)

\(^1\)Wellek, II, 202-4. \(^2\)Bate, Prefaces, pp. 123-138. \(^3\)Ibid., p. 134. \(^4\)Ibid., p. 128.
My own interpretation is quite obviously based upon this one. But my interpretation is more exclusively "psychological," with Hazlitt's two primary points of reference being the evaluation of the mental state of the poet in the process of composition, and the evaluation of the poet's potential effects on the minds of his audience. And I find it necessary to shift the emphasis from objective truth as Hazlitt's primary standard of literary value to relative poetic effect; and therefore from the relative concreteness and objectivity of a work, to its relative power.

For one thing, the whole relation of poetry to truth cannot, it seems to me, be defined in terms of its concreteness and particularity. For the "imagination," according to Hazlitt, affirms the reality and power of the aesthetic qualities in nature, the validity of the "aesthetic intuitions of mankind." The qualities thus intuited are not concrete and particular, and they cannot be affirmed by the senses alone, as concreteness and particularity conceivably could be. The "imagination" is more than a super-refinement upon sense perception. Since poetic truth, in Hazlitt, does seem to be an important element of poetic power, perhaps it would be better to say that the power of nature and the truth of nature must be recognized as being intimately combined, and that a similar relation exists between the power of poetry and the truth of poetry. In one way, the degree of a poem's power is a surer sign of the degree of its poetic truth, than is its objective concreteness and particularity.¹

¹See Albrecht, PMLA, LXXV, p. 246: "Anything that
At any rate, if one attributes all Hazlitt's statements of praise and blame to the ideal of poetic truth as the objective expression of concrete and particular reality, many more inconsistencies appear in his critical pronouncements than are necessary. Hazlitt finds much of the "poetry of fancy" to be concrete, but he obviously considers the same poetry to be very bad. Many of the truths expressed by the "poetry of wit" are abstract in tendency; and yet Hazlitt finds them valuable, and bestows upon the "poetry of wit" high praise. Even Wordsworth's abstract and subjective poetry contains valuable elements of truth. Finally, the poetry of Spenser and Milton belongs to the category of "poetry of imagination" but neither poet approximates Shakespearean concreteness and objectivity in his work.

I think one should also take into consideration the fact that Hazlitt's evaluation of a poetic effect is always clear and consistent, but that his idea of poetic truth (or any other kind, for that matter) is an ignis fatuis, and seems to vary from one discussion to the next. I think it is also important that Hazlitt never says that the truth of poetry (imaginative truth) has a greater validity than the truth of science (reasonable truth). He mourns that the poetic view limits the poet's sympathetic understanding of human experience limits a poem's 'truth.' So does anything that limits the poet's communication of his feelings. Long and hard use has drained the power from images used by the poets of 'commonplaces.' . . . The 'poetry of paradox' . . . too often uses materials with a private and exclusive charge . . . and is therefore inadequate to convey their /the poets of the Lake School/ sometimes admirable 'sentiments and reflections on human life.'
of the world has been replaced by the scientific one, but he
can chide Wordsworth for his bigotted attitude toward the
discoveries of science. ¹ Therefore, it seems to me dangerous
to say unequivocally that it is the "trueness" of the imagi-
native view of the glowworm which makes it superior to the
reasonable one.

One can find ultimate security in Hazlitt's essential
orientation, which is a social one. For Hazlitt never loses
sight of an intimate relation between literature and society.
The effect of dramatic tragedy is the cultivation of general
benevolence. The "poetry of wit" is a "discipline of humanity."
Opera may serve "to assist the euthanasia of the British charact-
er . . . and of British morals." Hazlitt's primary concern
with the difference between "reason" and "imagination" in his
essay on that subject is to show that the vague, abstract and
general approach of "reason" has no rhetorical value, and there-
fore cannot help eradicate social ills. The poets of "para-
dox" have good ideals, but they cannot communicate them to a
sufficiently large audience to actually effect social reform.

Hazlitt, it seems to me, is an inadequate philosopher
(at least to the modern mind) in the sense that he does not
attempt to resolve the conflict, suggested by his literary
criticism, between the claims to truth of science and poetry.
But he does have an adequate social conscience, and an adequately
developed conception of man's nature, constructed in order

¹Works, XIX, 15.
to defy the "selfish hypothesis," upon which to base a view of literature. The real task of literature, for Hazlitt, is neither to express truth, nor to produce ecstasy and transport for their own sakes, although it may do both. Its task is really a social one, which is also semi-religious: For literature can be said to be "great" to the extent that it expresses, appeals to, and nurtures the spiritual nature of man.
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