William Hazlitt (1778-1830)

a paper given at Kilve Court, July,1993
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(*The Coleridge Bulletin* New Series No 2 (Autumn 1993), pp 33-46)

William Hazlitt was the son of a Dissenter, a Unitarian minister, and therefore likely to be regarded by adherents to Church and Throne as politically subversive and as a religious sceptic. Not being of aristocratic birth, not having attended university, not being by occupation a member of a recognized profession, not even in the last years of his life a ratepayer, and therefore not entitled to vote, this one-time portrait painter, one-time newspaper reporter of Parliamentary debates, William Hazlitt, essayist, lecturer and critic and contentious rackets and fives player, would have been regarded by the cultural establishment of his time as a peripheral hack writer- albeit a notable one- to be placed with Leigh Hunt and Keats in the 'cockney school'.

Never at ease in society, least of all in the drawing-rooms of cultivated ladies, Hazlitt showed clumsy deference even when paying a visit to Leigh Hunt before they became better acquainted. That was in 1814. Hunt was serving his sentence for his adjudged libel of the Prince Regent in Marshalsea prison, in a cell or room adorned with a wallpaper pattern of trellised rose. Leigh Hunt records in his *Autobiography*:

> William Hazlitt, who there first did me the honour of a visit, would stand interchanging amenities at the threshold, which I had great difficulty in making him pass. I know not which kept his hat off with the greater pertinacity of deference, I to the diffident cutter-up of Tory dukes and kings, or he to the amazing prisoner and invalid who issued out of a bower of roses.

'The generality of mankind,' Hazlitt once wrote regretfully, 'are contented to be estimated by what they possess, instead of for what they are.

His gauche manners here, as prison visitor, are not expressing creepy social deference; he is paying respect to a champion of civil liberty, a cause he never ceased to espouse.

A year later in Hunt's *Examiner*, writing *On Common-place Critics* - though not, fortunately, on commonplace lecturers - Hazlitt declared:' A commonplace critic has something to say upon every occasion, and he always tells you either what is not true, or what you knew before, or what is not worth knowing.'

Good, forthright stuff - Hazlitt is always forthright in his assertions,

rarely merely opinionated. On his behalf, I have something to say on this occasion, I hope what I say will be true, though it will be selectively partial - and no doubt that 'damaged angel', Coleridge, and the sublimely egotistical Wordsworth, will be battered and punctured in consequence. If you know it all already, you will know what I have left out. And if most of what I leave in is about Hazlitt, and from his point of view, then without apology, I declare on his behalf that it is worth knowing.

I shall in fairness, of course, include Coleridge's and Wordsworth's appraisals of Hazlitt. But since those are for the most part disparaging, allow me first to establish Hazlitt in the eyes of other acquaintances.

On first meeting Hazlitt and his sister in 1803, Mary Lamb declared that she liked them very much indeed. She continued to do so, as did brother Charles, who wrote subsequently: ‘I stood well with him for 15 years (the proudest of my life). I think I shall go to my grave without finding, or expecting to find, such another companion.’

In 1821, the diarist, Crabb Robinson, whose friendship with Hazlitt was severed for five years through Wordsworth's intervention, wrote: ‘Hazlitt and I now speak again but he does not omit the 'Sir' when he talks to me. I think he behaves with propriety and dignity towards me; considering the severity of my attack on him, which, though warranted by my friendship to Wordsworth, was not justified according to the customs of society.’

When Hazlitt died in 1830, a journalist, Cyrus Redding wrote:

> He concealed nothing. His character was perfectly simple, and he expected to find everybody else the same. He had no concealed thought, for he brought all out, good, bad, or indifferent: it was his nature. lt was not wonderful that a man who spoke out all he thought should have been abused and shunned.

And a latter-day friend, Thomas Talfourd alluded to ‘...the memory of one who was my great Master in the Art of Thinking, and the recollection of whose society is dearer to me than the enjoyment of that of my dearest friends.’

Culled almost at random, here are a few observations of Hazlitt's, which fairly define the man:

‘It requires some fortitude to oppose one's opinion, however right, to that of all the world besides; none at all to agree with it, however wrong.’ There speaks the contending outsider.

Likewise when Hazlitt asserts:’ An honest man is one whose sense of

right and wrong is stronger than his anxiety that others should speak well of him.’

Furthermore, he declares elsewhere:’ the most disagreeable people are the most amiable. They are the only persons who feel an interest in what does not concern them.’ He is using 'disagreeable' in its literal sense, of course, not in the more modern sense of 'unpleasant'. 'Disinterestedness' was an attitude of mind that Hazlitt rated highly, though he did not always maintain it. Keats, who admired Hazlitt as friend and as an influence upon his own thinking, wrote That ‘Very few men have ever arrived at complete disinterestedness of Mind’. He finds himself able to cite only two whose lives evince sustained disinterestedness: Jesus and Socrates.

Keats rejoiced, too, in Hazlitt's 'disagreeableness': ‘Hazlitt has damned the bigoted and the bluestockinged,’ he wrote in a letter,’ how durst the Man? he is your only good damner, and if ever I am damn'd— damn me if I shoul'n't like him to damn me.’

And a final *bon mot* of Hazlitt's: ‘He will never have true friends who is afraid of making enemies.’

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How did those geniuses of his starry-eyed youth, Wordsworth and Coleridge, never exactly his friends, become his enemies?

As we all know, Hazlitt made his ‘first acquaintanceship with the poets’ in 1798, when he was 20 years old. At the beginning of the year he had walked 12 miles to Shrewsbury to hear Coleridge, the prospective Unitarian minister for the town, preach wondrously. And then, two days later, Coleridge had come to stay with the Hazlitt family at Wem, where Mr Hazlitt was the minister. And then, in the early summer, in response to Coleridge's invitation to visit his home in Nether Stowey, Wordsworth, at Alfoxden, strode into Hazlitt's ken. Hazlitt stayed in their company for three weeks. But 25 years were to pass before Hazlitt set down his recollections of that time in his famous Essay.

It is perhaps worth mentioning at this point that Hazlitt's bibliographer, Elizabeth Schneider has reported: ‘Wherever Hazlitt's recollections can be tested against other evidence, they show almost no distortion and very few errors.’

Five years later, in 1803, when he was trying to make a career as a portrait painter, Hazlitt followed up a stay of four months study and

copying in the Louvre with two visits to the Lake District, where he renewed acquaintance with the poets, including now, Robert Southey, using one occasion to paint portraits of Coleridge and his son, Hartley. Both pictures, alas, have been lost. Wordsworth sat for him as well, but, Wordsworth recorded in a letter to Hazlitt's son in 1834, ‘as he did not satisfy himself or my friends, the unfinished work was destroyed.’

As far as Coleridge and Wordsworth were concerned, Hazlitt's time in the Lakes — at Keswick to be precise - ended ignominiously with an embarrassing encounter with a village-girl and subsequently her chums, who sent Hazlitt packing.

We all think we know about *that* episode of Hazlitt's career, not least because it dogged him long after and for years, when it became related in literary circles, in letters, diaries and was referred to obliquely in print. No two versions are the same, however. Not even Coleridge's, the most self-regardingly pompous, and Wordsworth's, the most snobbishly contemptible.

The third phase of Hazlitt's acquaintanceship with the poets occurred, in London and is spread intermittently through the years 1808 to 1819. Those were the years of Hazlitt's first marriage, to Sarah Stoddart, and were spent for the most part either at the Hut, as Hazlitt styled their retreat at Winterslow near Salisbury, or in London.

On his rare visits from the Lake District, Wordsworth sometimes had the disagreeable misfortune of finding Hazlitt among the select guests at Charles Lamb's Wednesday evenings. In 1811, Coleridge, following a visit to the Lakes, where he had fallen out with Wordsworth, took lodgings in Southampton Buildings off Chancery Lane. There he found Hazlitt to be one of his neighbours. Their meetings were not unfriendly, though the drug-dependent Coleridge, critical of Lamb's pipe-smoking and drinking, feared that his friend would never give up these vices so long as he kept Hazlitt's company.

In 1812 and in 1818, Coleridge and Hazlitt were lecturing concurrently. Hazlitt often attended and reported upon Coleridge's lectures; Coleridge never attended his.

During the last decade of Hazlitt's life, as far as I can tell, there were no more personal encounters with the poets. Just as well. In 1819 his marriage to Sarah was dissolved in Edinburgh, partly because of his insufficiency as a breadwinner but more so because of his infatuation for another Sarah, his lodging-housekeeper's daughter in London. Failing to win this Sarah, Hazlitt entered into a second marriage. This, to a

widow, Mrs. Bridgewater, lasted little more than the year of 1824, which was spent largely in travel on the Continent, accompanied in part by Hazlitt's 16 year-old son, William. It was a case of two's company, three's none.

Hazlitt died, aged 52, in solitary lodging in Frith Street, Soho, visited only by his son and Charles Lamb. It is said that he died of tannic acid induced by excessive tea-drinking. He had refrained from alcohol after emerging from a sorrowful binge induced by the defeat of his hero, Napoleon, at Waterloo.

Though he may not have been in the poets' company during this last decade, they were not far from his mind. For it was in 1823 that he published his account of his first acquaintanceship of 1798, and in 1825, he devoted a chapter to each of them in his account of contemporary notables: *The Spirit of the Age*. These appraisals, recollected in relative tranquillity, are memorably expressive and fairly dispassionate.

But why did the acquaintance never develop into durable friendship, especially as all three were always welcome as visitors to the Wednesday evenings at the Lambs? Looked at from Hazlitt's perspective, it is a tale of fallen angels.

‘Bliss was it in that dawn to be alive,’ but the aftermath of apostasy was lamentable. From the point of view of the poets, a story of a nagging, dissolute and presumptuous serpent, presuming to rise above its station and to appropriate the profounder thoughts of, and even to criticise, those established by genius in a God-given Garden of Eden.

What had the young Hazlitt received from that memorable sermon in Shrewsbury back in 1798? Manna from heaven. Coleridge had spoken ‘upon peace and war; upon church and state - not,’ Hazlitt interjects, ‘on their alliance, but their separation - on the spirit of the world and the spirit of Christianity, not as the same, but opposed to one another. He talked of those who had 'inscribed the

cross of Christ on banners dripping with human gore'. He made a poetical and pastoral excursion, - and to shew the fatal effects of war, drew a striking contrast between the simple shepherd boy, driving his team afield or sitting under the hawthorn, piping to his flock, 'as though he should never grow old', and the same poor country-lad, crimped, kidnapped, brought into town, made drunk at an ale-house, turned into a wretched drummer-boy...'. ‘Such,’ Hazlitt comments, ‘were the notes our once-lov'd poet sung’.

Had Mr Hazlitt been present, he would surely have approved of the sermon. During four years in America when William was an infant, he

had been ‘tossed about from congregation to congregation in the heats of the Unitarian controversy, and squabbles about the American war.’ And now, his son recalls, he had ‘been relegated to an obscure village, where he was to spend the last thirty years of his life, far from the converse that he loved, the talk about disputed texts of Scripture and the cause of civil and religious liberty.’ It is that cause that had sounded from Coleridge's sermon as music to the ears of Mr Hazlitt's son. Coleridge's retreat from it in later years was to tarnish for Hazlitt the image of his poet-philosopher-preacher.

But at this time- 1798- it was sufficient for the impressionable 20 year-old to have the windows of his imagination opened by the free flow of Coleridge's discourse on the avant-garde ideas of 18th century philosophers: Hume, Hartley and Bishop Berkeley - and to receive an invitation to stay with Mr and Mrs Coleridge at Nether Stowey.

Alas, Sara Coleridge forms no part of Hazlitt's recollection of his stay in May/June of that year. Wordsworth's sister is recalled, however, setting out a 'frugal repast' for Coleridge and Hazlitt on their first visit to Alfoxden, Wordsworth himself being absent. Poetry features more prominently than it had at Wem. Coleridge ‘read aloud in a sonorous and musical voice’ The Ballad of Betty Foy and three other narrative poems of Wordsworth's, while seated ‘on the trunk of an old ash-tree’. Much appreciated. But do I suspect a yawn behind Hazlitt's recollection of the walk back to Stowey that evening, Coleridge's voice sounding

‘high:
'Of Providence, foreknowledge, will, and fate,
Fix'd fate, free-will, foreknowledge absolute.’?

Hazlitt is certainly anticipating his subsequent view of Coleridge as a fallen angel, tirelessly 'holding forth' but, as Hazlitt seems to see him, sadly locked in an infernal circle of indeterminate speculations. The next day, when Wordsworth had

returned from Bristol, *Peter Bell* was read by its author, announcing ‘the fate of his hero in prophetic tones’.

Hazlitt reports ‘ a *chaunt* in the recitation both of Coleridge and Wordsworth, which acts as a spell upon the hearer, and disarms the judgement’. One might have expected a more informal style from Wordsworth - a man speaking to men - especially as Coleridge noted for Hazlitt ‘ a matter-of-fact-ness’ in Wordsworth's poetry. However, Hazlitt does make a distinction between Coleridge's manner, ‘more full, animated and varied; Wordsworth's more equable, sustained and internal.

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The one might be termed more *dramatic*’, the other more *lyrical*.’ Both, he tells us, were walking composers: Coleridge preferring ‘uneven ground, or breaking through the straggling branches of a copsewood; whereas Wordsworth always wrote...walking up and down a straight gravel-walk.’ But this is little more than feature-writer's reportage. So indeed is Hazlitt's response to Wordsworth's looking out of a latticed window and observing: 'How beautifully the sun sets on that yellow bank!' -’I thought to myself: 'With what eyes these poets see nature!' and ever after, when I saw the sunset stream upon the objects facing it, conceived I had made a discovery, or thanked Mr Wordsworth for having made one for me!’

I am tempted to dismiss that gush as uncharacteristic of forthright Hazlitt. But throughout his life he responded to nature with romantic perception, and with a painter's eye. He was never happier, as his latest and best biographer, Stanley Jones, observes than when seeking out 'loopholes of retreat' - Hazlitt's phrase - from social, urban life. Walking to Linton with Coleridge, Hazlitt relates: ‘We walked for miles and miles on dark brown heaths overlooking the channel, with the Welsh hills beyond, and at times descended into little sheltered valleys close by the sea-side, with a smuggler's face scowling by us, and then had to ascend conical hills with a path winding through a coppice to a barren top, like a monk's shaven crown, from one of which I pointed out to Coleridge's notice the bare masts of a vessel on the very edge of the horizon and within the red-orbed disk of the setting sun, like his own spectre-ship in *The Ancient Mariner*.’

I prefer that to Wordsworth's ‘How beautifully the sun sets on that yellow bank!’

Hazlitt records no walk shared with Wordsworth. But he does allude in this essay to an occasion five years or so later when on his fateful visit to the lakes he went sailing on Grasmere lake with Wordsworth in the poet's boat. Hazlitt bravely hinted that Wordsworth might have ‘borrowed the idea of his *Poem on the Naming of Places* from the idyllic French romance, *Paul and Virginia*.’ Wordsworth-- I

quote - ‘did not own the obligation, and stated some distinction without difference, in defence of his claim to originality’.

This seems an appropriate moment to remind you of the incident in Keswick that cooked Hazlitt's goose in terms of Coleridge's and Wordsworth's estimation of him. But before going into that, I would like to refer you to Hazlitt's *Essay on the Principles of Human Action*,

published in 1805. In it he consciously shifts his style from the conventional student-philosophy style of his earlier writings. He aims for a more familiar mode, capable of reproducing the tone and plain speech of ordinary discourse, man-to-man. This new style was ridiculed as eccentric. Yet Hazlitt's aim is similar for prose as Wordsworth's revolutionary aim - as Wordsworth believed - for poetry as proclaimed in his Preface to the *Lyrical Ballads*. At this time, one may say, Wordsworth and Hazlitt shared an objective: to extend, as it were, the franchise of literature: the elect should step down from the pedestal and engage informally with the electorate.

Shortly before the Keswick episode, Coleridge commended Hazlitt to the attention of Thomas Wedgwood in a letter as ‘ a thinking, observant, original man, of great power as a Painter of Character-Portraits,’ in which capacity Coleridge asks his friend to recommend him to others. On the credit side, Coleridge deems Hazlitt to be ‘kindly natured’, ‘fond of.. and patient with children’; disinterested’ and in his conversation, ‘ says more than any man I ever knew (yourself only excepted) that is his own in a way of his own’. However, ‘His manners are 99 in 100 singularly repulsive;... he is jealous, gloomy, and of an irritable pride’. Coleridge concludes: ‘If you could recommend him as a portrait-painter, I should be glad. To be your companion, he is, in my opinion, utterly unfit.’

It may be even then, a few weeks before the Keswick episode, Coleridge had got wind of a perverse democracy of taste in Hazlitt's sexual appetite: a penchant for night-encounters of the kind that James Boswell and Samuel Pepys recorded as furtive conquests in their diaries. Easy game around St. James's Park while Hazlitt was living in nearby York Street, but a risky try-on in a Lakeland village, where one would be regarded as an interloper from foreign parts. All the more so if one did not cut a fine figure, as Hazlitt appears not to have done.

Ten years are to pass before Wordsworth and Coleridge are, to use the Keswick episode to discredit Hazlitt in London's literary circles. In the year and the month of Waterloo, when Hazlitt was about the only Englishman to regard Napoleon as a preferable tyrant to the reactionary leaders of governments in European countries set against him, Crabb Robinson, a friend of Wordsworth's and

Lamb's and an intermittent friend of Hazlitt, noted in his diary: ‘It appears that Hazlitt...narrowly escaped being ducked by the populace and probably sent to to prison for some gross attacks on women... The populace were incensed against him and

pursued him, but he escaped to Wordsworth who took him into his house at midnight, gave him clothes and money (from 3 to 5 pounds).’ The source of this belated information was, of course, Wordsworth.

In Gillman's Life of Coleridge we are told that ‘his very life had been saved by Coleridge and Mr Southey.’ Coleridge had told him so, of course, just as Coleridge took pains to inform the Reverend Wrangham in a letter written in 1817, at least 13 years after the event. He writes: ‘...after efforts of friendship on my part which a brother could not have demanded - my House, Purse, Influence - and all this, because I was persuaded that he was a young man of great talent and utterly friendless,’ these ‘efforts’, he declares, were ‘baffled’...’by the most unmanly vices that almost threatened to communicate a portion of their infamy to my family and Southey's and Wordsworth's, in all of which he had been familiarized, and in mine and Southey's domesticated - after having been snatched from an infamous punishment by Southey and myself... after having given him all the money I had in the world, and the very shoes off my feet to enable him to escape over the mountain - and since that time never, either of us, injured him in the least degree - unless the quiet withdrawing from any further connection with him (and this without ostentation, or any mask of shyness when we accidentally met him) not merely or chiefly on account of his Keswick conduct, but from the continued depravity of his life - but why need I say more?’

Why indeed? Especially as by 1817, Coleridge, ravaged by laudanum addiction, had been rivalled by Hazlitt as a lecturer, and been subjected in print to Hazlitt's more-in-sorrow-than-in-anger criticism of Coleridge's failure to fulfil great literary expectations. But Coleridge has his present reason for exposing Hazlitt to the Reverend Wrangham. ‘This man,’ he concludes, ‘Mr Jeffrey has sought out’ - Francis Jeffrey, that is, the notable editor of the *Edinburgh Review* had engaged Hazlitt to write for his magazine - ‘Knowing all this, because the wretch is notorious for his avowed hatreds of me and affected contempt for Southey.’ Why need I say more?

By 1817, according to a not reliable witness, Benjamin Haydon, friend of Hazlitt's, Wordsworth was confiding ‘with great horror Hazlitt's licentious conduct to the girls of the Lake & that no woman could walk after dark for 'his Satyr & beastly appetites'. Some girl called him a black-faced rascal, when Hazlitt enraged pushed her down '& because, Sir,' said Wordsworth, 'she refused to gratify his

abominable & devilish propensities, he lifted up her petticoats & smote her on the bottom.'

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A more laid-back account is given by Peter Patmore: 'a story relating to Hazlitt's alleged treatment of some pretty village jilt, who, when he was on a visit to Wordsworth,, had led him to believe she was not insensible to his attentions, and then, having induced him to 'commit' himself to her in some ridiculous manner, turned round upon him, and made him the laughing stock of the village.' I have to add, though, that Patmore's *My Friends & Acquaintance*, in which this account appeared, was not published until 1854.

In the intervening years, Wordsworth on his rare visits to London took no pleasure in meeting Hazlitt. In 1808, in a letter to Coleridge, he relates: 'I come now to *The White Doe*. I took the manuscript (of the poem) to the Lambs, to read it, or part of it, one evening. There unluckily I found Hazlitt, and his beloved (his first wife, Sarah Stoddart); of course, though I had the poem in my hand, I declined, nay absolutely refused to read it. But as they were very earnest in entreating me, I at last consented to read one book.'

By 1815 reactionary governments in Europe were securely established. In Britain, post-Waterloo, the Tory government responded to economic depression, the collapse of small banks, civil unrest, Luddism and corn riots with draconian measures. The Prince Regent declared that ' these severe trials were chiefly to be attributed to obscure unavoidable causes' and trusted that 'the people would continue to sustain them with exemplary patience and fortitude.' *Plus ça change*.

In response Coleridge, Wordsworth and Southey took reactionary shelter: notably, much to Hazlitt's disgust, Wordsworth accepted a government appointment in 1812 as Distributor of Stamps for Westmorland. Hazlitt's response to restrictions on civil and religious liberties is eloquently stated in his *Political Essays*, 1819 : 'I deny that liberty and slavery are convertible terms, that right and wrong, truth and falsehood, plenty and famine, the comforts and wretchedness of a people, are matters of perfect indifference'. To him, Tory Government and Whig Opposition appeared as 'one flesh':

Strange that such difference should be
Twixt Tweedledum and Tweedledee.

On the literary front, in 1811, when Coleridge and Hazlitt were both lodging in Southampton Buildings, Coleridge gave a course on Shakespeare and Milton. In that year, J.P. Collier in a note of conversation at Lamb's states that Hazlitt 'did not think Coleridge at all

competent to the task of lecturing on Shakespeare, as he was not well read in him. He knew little more than was in elegant extracts and Hazlitt himself had told him of many beautiful passages.'

The following year, Hazlitt gave a course of lectures on the *Rise and Progress of Modern Philosophy*. A year later, Coleridge was complaining that Hazlitt, then a dramatic critic for *The Examiner*, had plagiarized his ideas. In 1818 they were lecturing in different venues at the same time. As I mentioned earlier, Hazlitt often attended Coleridge's lectures; Coleridge attended not one of Hazlitt's.'

In his writings for *The Examiner*, Hazlitt regretted, as he often did, Coleridge's poetic indolence since 1798. In his 1816 review of *Christabel and Other Poems*, Hazlitt acknowledges Coleridge as ' a man of ...universality of genius', and praises *Christabel*. He concludes, however, that 'The sorceress seems to act without power Christabel to yield without resistance,' a just conclusion in my judgement of a poem that for all its ambiguities and atmospherics is tame on narrative drama.

Hazlitt saw fit to review the advertisement of Coleridge's *The Friend*, and asks what is 'itself but an enormous title page; the longest and most tiresome prospectus that ever was written; an endless preface to an imaginary work; a table of contents that fills the whole volume; a huge bill of fare of all possible subjects, with not an idea to be had for love or money?'

In fairness to Coleridge, I should add that in his Prospectus to *The Friend* he admits: 'The Number of my unrealized schemes and the mass of my miscellaneous fragments, have often furnished my friends with a subject of raillery and sometimes of regret and reproof!'

Lecturing in 1818 on *The English Poets* Hazlitt spoke of Coleridge as he was: 'In his descriptions, you then saw the progress of human happiness and liberty in bright and never-ending succession, like the steps of Jacob's ladder, with airy shapes ascending and descending, and with the voice of God at the top of the ladder. And shall I, who heard him then, listen to him now? Not I! That spell is broke; that time is gone for ever; that voice is heard no more; but still the recollections come rushing by with thoughts of long-past years, and rings in my ears with never-dying sound.' To this he adds a stanza from his favourite Wordsworth poem, the *Intimations Ode*, the one beginning: 'What though the radiance which was once so bright...'.

In Crabb Robinson's judgement, Coleridge ‘will not on the whole add to his reputation’ by his 1818 lectures. It appears that Hazlitt did by his. Mary Russell Mitford particularly admired him as ‘the most delightful lecturer I ever heard... the best demolisher of a bloated, unwieldy overblown fame that ever existed’. Likening him to Voltaire, she admits that Hazlitt ‘has a genius for contempt and I am afraid, very much afraid, that I like him the better for it.’

In 1820 Hazlitt besought Coleridge to rouse himself and preach once more the ideals of freedom, justice and humanity,...’and shake the pillared rottenness of the world!’ Hazlitt touched a raw nerve. In Coleridge's letters at this time, Stanley Jones observes, ‘ his panic and bewilderment hints at some unavowed justice in Hazlitt's reproaches.’

What of relations between Wordsworth and Hazlitt during the teens of the century? After 1812 they were never in the same room together. In 1818, when in London overseeing the publication of *The White Doe of Rylstone*, Wordsworth requested Lamb specifically not to admit Hazlitt to his home when he himself was there. Although Lamb acceded, he remained ever loyal to his friendship with Hazlitt. Much to Wordsworth's annoyance, Lamb lent Hazlitt his copy of *The Excursion* at Hazlitt's request.

During these years, Hazlitt had several meetings in print with Wordsworth's poetry, which he admired deeply and responded to perceptively. One can wish that Hazlitt had read *The Prelude*, but that work, far finer than *The Excursion*, was not published until long after his death. Lamb told a sceptical Crabb Robinson that Hazlitt wept because he could not praise