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THE IRRITABLE GENIUS

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When Charles Lamb had to defend his old and quarrelsome friend William Hazlitt in public his praise was warm and generous as one might expect: the more so, since the two men had been estranged for some time. In 1823 Lamb replied to an attack by Robert Southey with a 'Letter of Elia to Robert Southey' in the *London Magazine*. There we find this famous passage on his friend.

What hath soured him, and made him to suspect his friends of infidelity towards him, when there was no such matter, I know not. I stood well with him for fifteen years (the proudest of my life), and have ever spoken my full mind of him to some, to whom his panegyric must naturally be least tasteful...I wish he would not quarrel with the world at the rate he does; but the reconciliation must be effected by himself, and I despair of living to see that day. But, protesting against much that he has written, and some things which he chooses to do; judging him by his conversation which I enjoyed so long, and relished so deeply; or by his books, in those places where no clouding passion intervenes - I should belie my own conscience, if I said less, than that I think William/Hazlitt/ to be, in his natural and healthy state, one of the wisest and finest spirits breathing. So far from being ashamed of that intimacy, which was betwixt us, it is my boast that I was able for so many years to have preserved it entire; and I think I shall go to my grave without finding, or expecting to find, such another companion.

On reading this, Hazlitt found it in himself to write, 'I think I must be friends with Lamb again, since he has written that magnanimous Letter to Southey, and told him a piece of his mind!'² The reconciliation with Lamb was effected; but Lamb was right to despair of Hazlitt's reconciliation with the world. Even on the personal level Lamb found the strain of friendship with Hazlitt trying, although he never doubted that their intimacy would continue. As he told Wordsworth in a letter of 1816, 'however, in spite of all, there is something tough in my attachment to Hazlitt which these violent strainings cannot quite dislocate or sever asunder. I get no conversation in London that is absolutely worth attending to but his.'³ Lamb and Hazlitt always found much to talk about. One might be forgiven for thinking it hard to quarrel with Lamb anyway, and quite impossible if one shared his interests and enjoyed his affection. But Hazlitt succeeded. His quarrel with the world penetrated even this far. But while to fall out with Lamb was perhaps inexcusable, Hazlitt's quarrel with himself and the world lays bare the pattern of his irritable genius.

As early as the second chapter of his literary biography Samuel Taylor Coleridge finds it necessary to answer the charge that men of genius are naturally irritable. He does this partly with reference to the 'freedom with personal character' typical of the vituperative literary quarrels in contemporary literary reviews and journals, quarrels to which William Hazlitt was so frequently party, often with Coleridge as his target. Two

hundred years after Hazlitt's birth his irritability is well-remembered, almost proverbial. He was proud of his own power to hate; and his young admirer John Keats transmits the quality of Hazlitt's choler for posterity with typical relish and gusto when he writes that, 'Hazlitt...is your only good damner and if ever I am damn'd - /damn me if/ I shouldn't like him to damn me.'⁴ Hazlitt's genius, however, is far less appreciated and still seems to present difficulties when his admirers and detractors alike try to define it. He did so many things without exclusively devoting himself to attaining excellence in one of them. His early attempts to become a painter gave way to his ambition to write an original philosophical work. His *Essay on the Principles of Human Action*, subtitled 'on the natural disinterestedness of the human mind', fell as stillborn from the press as any work of David Hume's, although in this case more deservedly. Subsequent political pamphlets, a critique of Malthus's notorious *Essay on Population* and an English *Grammar* were hardly enough to support the newly-married philosopher, and Hazlitt must have been relieved to secure a post on the *Morning Chronicle* which launched him on the journalistic career which was to provide him with an income, off and on, for the rest of his life. From this relatively secure economic base he could indulge such purely intellectual projects as his lectures on English philosophy of 1812, and his later lectures on the English poets, comic writers, and the dramatic literature of the age of Elizabeth. As well as the dramatic, literary and political criticism which earned him his living, he found time to write the gallery of literary portraits entitled *The Spirit of the Age*, a journal of his travels, the confessional *Liber Amoris*, and the massively dutiful *Life of Napoleon*.

There is a temptation to regard this prolific output as having dissipated wastefully an original, intense talent. Hazlitt's essays - the form of the great majority of his writings - then appear as the anecdotal fragments of his early ambition to be a great painter or philosopher. Alternatively, one can regard his essays as charged and elevated by the fundamental seriousness of a creative artist or a systematic thinker. This does seem to have been Hazlitt's own view. In an essay *On the Causes of Popular Opinion* he tells us that his own writings 'are not, then, so properly the works of an author by profession, as the thoughts of a metaphysician expressed by a painter. They are subtle and difficult problems translated into hieroglyphics.'⁵ The act of translation which Hazlitt claims his essay-writing to be then defines this work as a way of combining his otherwise undeveloped talents as artist and philosopher. The essays, far from betraying his original ambitions, join them together in a new literary form.

Hazlitt's presentation of his essay-writing as an act of translation takes up a theme recurring throughout his work. It is a theme which connects the products of Hazlitt's genius with his renowned irritability in an illuminating and significant way. On close reading one discovers that everyone translates in Hazlitt's writings. Painters are described as translating in their way and poets in theirs. And the excellence of every art is found, for Hazlitt, in its untranslatability. Hazlitt believes that one work of art may be written in the language of poetry, another in the language of painting, another in the language of sculpture, and so on. He thinks that each art can be evaluated and judged by the degree to which it gives an idiomatic expression in its chosen language to whatever it imitates or translates from nature. He thinks French painting is bad because it is a bad translation. When Hazlitt compares Wordsworth unfavourably with Rousseau it is in terms of his 'translation'. He criticizes Jeremy Bentham

for writing a language peculiar to himself which then requires re-translation into our language before it can be understood. And all these particular translations are founded on Hazlitt's general presentation of the human attempt to make sense of and interpret the world as the effort to understand or translate a language: 'there is a language of things as well as words', he writes in a *Definition of Wit*.⁶ 'He sees most of nature who understands its language best',⁷ according to his *Outlines of Taste*. In one of his most famous essays, *The Indian Jugglers*, he wrote:

Nature is also a language. Objects, like words, have a meaning; and the true artist is the interpreter of this language... Thus the eye is too blind a guide of itself to distinguish between the warm or cold tone of a deep blue sky, but another sense acts as a monitor to it, and does not err.⁸

A translation of something must be different and yet the same. It must adhere to its original, and yet its purpose is to transform that original. This tension within the concept of translation begins to explain Hazlitt's irritability. On the one hand he thought that the essence of human originality was truth: that the most human or idiomatic translation was the most truthful interpretation of the world. On the other hand, he felt that this basic optimism was belied by the example of the age in which he lived. When he looked around and tested the spirit of the age he found that his belief in a disinterested humanism was hard to justify. Though he consistently maintained his belief in the 'theoretical benevolence' of man, the 'practical malignity' of the same creature made him painfully aware of the typically human frailty of trying to be original at the expense of the truth. The human translation of the world then becomes expedient and contrived, rather than faithful and true. Hazlitt was frequently tempted into viewing our attempts to tell the truth about the world as mere deceit. What is then lost in the act of translation is the thing itself: the word hides the thing rather than pointing to and revealing it. The discrepancies in our translations show us to be natural liars. In his *Aphorisms on Man* Hazlitt announced this verdict with Swiftian bitterness:

It has often been made a subject of dispute, What is the distinguishing characteristic of man? And the answer may, perhaps, be given that *he is the only animal that dresses... Fine feathers make fine birds* - this lie is the motto of the human mind. Dress a fellow in sheepskin, and he is a clown - dress him in scarlet, and he is a gentleman. It is then the clothes that makes all the difference; and the moral agent is simply the lay-figure to hang them on. Man, in short, is the only creature in the known world, with whom appearances pass for realities, words for things...⁹

In that passage what is human in a translation is its deceit, the word presuming over the thing, like a dress hiding a body. But Hazlitt knew that this was only a partial view. The man who gave the lie to it was the greatest translator of them all, Shakespeare. He perceived more than anyone the 'compound' nature of humanity, the tension of our life, its quality, said Hazlitt, quoting from *All's Well*, 'as of a mingled yarn, good and ill together', adhering to the truth yet unavoidably creating our own version of the truth in an act of translation.

This idea of translation which Hazlitt uses so often to describe the human attempt to understand reveals the connection between his natural irritability and his own genius for understanding. They cannot be separated.

His irritability cannot be exclusively attributed to an irreproachable critical position any more than to his excessive love of green tea. Nor can his genius be entirely separated from that of those of his contemporaries he criticized. Historical limitations oppressed Hazlitt as much as any poet. The character of 'paradox' which he thought the spirit of the age had inflicted on contemporary poetry also beset his own writings as we shall see. He was a translator just as much as any contemporary artist or thinker. His distinguishing quality was that he was acutely and irritably aware of the torn loyalties of the man who takes it upon himself to interpret life for others, who essays to be a translator. On the one hand he must be true to his original; on the other hand, his translation is not, cannot be disinterested. Its selectivity is what defines it.

Many critics favourable to Hazlitt have done less than justice to the complexity of his critical position by insisting that all his controversies can be explained by saying that he was a man of principle. We are told that we must realize that no individual friendship ever came in the way of Hazlitt's allegiance to an ideal of truth. Adherence to a principle always lies behind his most personal abuse. The consistency of his principles, whether they be philosophical, aesthetic, or political, is the chief thing to be recognized and cherished in his writings. But this overlooks the vital point, which is that Hazlitt was well aware that to be principled was *not* to be impartial but rather to be committed. He believed that man was naturally benevolent, but he would use all his rhetorical force of arms to make this fact clear to those whose actions were malevolent. It is because he believes that man is a poetical animal that he is enraged at attempts to debase this high calling, and instead calls him 'a Toad-Eating Animal'. It is because his opponents ignore their social duties that Hazlitt's criticism becomes personal, and is nonetheless distasteful for that. In his essay *On Good Nature* he writes that 'disagreeable people are the most amiable. They are the only persons who feel an interest in what does not concern them.' Because others abuse humanity, Hazlitt argues that we take pleasure in hating them, although our hate is equally poisonous as 'we throw aside the trammels of civilisation, the flimsy veil of humanity'.¹⁰ Hazlitt's temper always rises just at that point where his benevolent principles meet resistance, where they find society refractory and no longer have any public application. Hazlitt's view of the world, his translation, is then at odds with its original: his irritability is the natural reaction with which he protects and fights for his version of the truth, or even, it seems more appropriate to say, tries to *make* his version the truth.

In an excellent review of a very bland biography of Hazlitt, John Kinnaird argues for the importance of Hazlitt's 'attack on the idea of an abstract purity: his refusal throughout his work to regard ideas, any ideas, whatever their political colour, as having their source or end in themselves, as free from personal bias, will and circumstances.'¹¹ This grouping of Hazlitt's necessary polemical activity with his very personal form of expression is crucial. Our sense of Hazlitt himself and his most vivid successes in self-dramatization within his writings, appear where he feels that a principle and not an individual is at stake. At that moment where he tells us that his own self-interest does not matter, and that truth alone is the issue, there paradoxically we hear Hazlitt's most personal tone.

This point can be illustrated if we remember Hazlitt's apparently

irrelevant interest in sportsmen, especially experts at the games of fives and rackets, and his fervent esteem for the great players of his time. Hazlitt himself was a keen player, and, significantly, a most competitive one, discarding clothing and growing more and more colourful in his language if the game became keenly contested and closely fought. In *The Indian Jugglers* he describes several of his heroes of the fives- and rackets-courts and says of one, 'in the Fleet or Kings' Bench, he would have stood against Powell, who was reckoned the best open-ground player of his time. This last-mentioned player is at present the keeper of the Fives-court, and we might recommend to him for a motto over his door - "Who enters here, forgets himself, his country, and his friends."¹² The point Hazlitt is making here is surely that one forgets these possessions, these constituents of personal identity in order to advance oneself, personally, by winning the game. And winning the game becomes one of those dramatic forms of self-assertion which Hazlitt took such pleasure in describing - hence his delight in recounting tales of rackets matches, prize-fighters, and all kinds of energetic characters. He wrote of greatness in man:

Greatness is great power, producing great effects. It is not enough that a man has great power in himself, he must shew it to all the world in a way that cannot be hid or gainsaid. He must fill up a certain idea in the public mind.¹³

We forget ourselves in order to express ourselves. The unselfish man is an involuntary hero. We are at our most dramatically convincing when we apparently suppress our personal interests. John Keats famously turned this paradoxical truth of Hazlitt's into a theory explaining the workings of the poet's imagination. The poet realizes his greatest power of self-projection by forgetting his own identity:

A Poet is the most unpoetical of any thing in existence; because he has no Identity - he is continually in for/ming/ and filling some other Body - the Sun, the Moon, the Sea and Men and Women who are creatures of impulse are poetical and have about them an unchangeable attribute - the poet has none; no identity - he is certainly the most unpoetical of all God's Creatures.¹⁴

What Keats, under the influence of Hazlitt, prescribes for the poet, Hazlitt himself acts out in his own writings. He is always at his most idiosyncratic while proclaiming and defending his disinterestedness. Yet there remains the difference between the two men residing in Hazlitt's desire to be a 'virtuous philosopher'. He does what Keats called 'an irritable reaching after fact & reason', the irritation we have seen generated in him when his fine, unselfish principles - defining the facts and reasons as *he* sees them - do not square with human behaviour. His dramatic role is directed by his irritation at this disparity, and by his paradoxical but most realistic desire to use all the means at his disposal, selfish and malevolent though they be, to make the world a fairer place.

Hazlitt knew that where the securing of the basic political rights at that time denied to the majority of the British population was concerned, there was no such thing as 'fair play'.* There is no such character nor no such thing', he fumed.

Whoever supposes himself to be free from all bias and prejudice in questions of this kind is deficient in self-knowledge; as he who supposes that mere abstract reason, without passion or prejudice, can ever be a match for strong passion and inveterate prejudice with all

aids of venal sophistry to boot, must be ignorant of human affairs and human nature. Mr Horne Tooke used to say, that 'he loved the King according to law.' This kind of loyalty would not recommend him at Court: it did not even keep him out of gaol.¹⁵

*In one of his political controversies he was infuriated when his opponent used the pseudonym 'Fair Play'.

He lived in an age which saw a steady increase in political repression and terror. The revolution in France frightened Pitt's government into severe censorship and vigorous police action against any social groups in England thought to be subversive. Unrest mounted among the working class as their corresponding societies were banned and their poverty worsened by the war with France and subsequent unalleviated unemployment. Eventually *Habeas Corpus* was suspended. In 1819 the establishment panicked and perpetrated the inexcusable massacre of working people at Peterloo, condoned by the Castlereagh administration. 'I met Murder on the way -', wrote Shelley, 'He had a mask like Castlereagh -' In France the Revolution was succeeded by Napoleon, who was soon regarded as a tyrannical traitor to its liberal ideals by those who, like Wordsworth, Coleridge and Southey, quickly abandoned their early radicalism for a Burkean conservatism. Hazlitt described this change of political opinion as going over to 'Legitimacy': the doctrine that whatever is, is right. In his desire to continue absolutely true to the original democratic principles of the Revolution he remained paradoxically, and perhaps perversely loyal to its natural son, Napoleon. Napoleon became for him the dramatic, heroic figure through which to preserve his links with the Revolution at all costs. Hazlitt was cast down as much by Waterloo as by Peterloo, and for the same reasons, he would have said. 'It is true,' he wrote in his Preface to his *Life of Napoleon*,

I admired the man; but what chiefly attracted me to him, was his being, as he had been long ago designated, 'the child and champion of the Revolution.' Of this character he could not divest himself, even though he wished it.¹⁶

What Napoleon really was like seems to have little to do with Hazlitt's argument. Once more, his commitment to egalitarian principles draws support from a personal mythology, conjuring up a dramatic character of great power to fight the oppressors of liberty with their own weapons. Hazlitt could believe that

Whatever faults might be found with (Napoleon's acts)... they did not proceed upon the avowed principle, that 'millions were made for one', but one for millions; and as long as this distinction was kept in view, liberty was saved, and the Revolution was untouched...¹⁷

Hazlitt's willing acceptance here of the supremacy of one man, 'the God of my idolatry', as he admits in *Liber Amoris*, is only a stratagem within his democratic politics. His personal hero-worship is a tactic in the fight against the intrusion of private and personal interests in politics: he writes again in *The Life of Napoleon*

There is a kind of *toilette* or drawing-room politics, which reduces the whole principle of civil government to a question of personal appearance and outward accomplishments. The partizans of this school...tell you plainly that 'they hate the smell of the people, the sight of the people, the touch of the people, their language, their occupations, their manners' - as if this was a matter of private taste and fancy, and

because the higher classes are better off than they, that alone gave them a right to treat the others as they pleased, and make them ten times more wretched than they are.¹⁸

Hazlitt's political convictions are so strong, and he regarded the contemporary political circumstances of his country as so dire, that he would use all the weapons of his irritable genius, paradoxical though they might be, in his rhetorical fight for what he thought was right. Consistency of principle was far too nice a consideration for someone with serious political convictions which he wanted to see carried out in practice, rather than beautifully embalmed in theory. He knew that,

The love of freedom is no match for the love of power, because the one is urged on by passion, while the other is in general the cold dictate of the understanding. With this natural disadvantage on the side of liberty, I know what I have come to expect from those persons who pique themselves on an extreme scrupulousness in the cause of the people. I find none of this scrupulousness in the friends of despotism: *they* are in earnest, the others are not.¹⁹

In Hazlitt, however, the despots found an enemy who was in deadly earnest. His political realism made him irritably aware how much of abstract purity and fairness he was sacrificing in order to advance his principles in a world which was far from ideal. But this awareness also instructed him in the art of dramatizing these principles, finding them heroes, fighting for them rhetorically. He had a genius for using the power of passion and prejudice against its own excesses. He knew how the personal tone, the engaging expression of the self, could win support and become one of the strongest weapons in the public interest. The public interest, the fundamental importance of politics was a concern which had been with Hazlitt from his earliest days at the New Unitarian College at Hackney. His father had emigrated to America to find a more liberal religious climate; but he had returned when he discovered that the political freedom of the new world had not produced a corresponding quality of religious toleration. For the young William Hazlitt, however, politics not religion was always the basis of social reform. When his father wrote to William at Hackney because he was concerned at the amount of time he was spending on an essay 'on the political state of man', he received this confident reply:

My chief reason for wishing to continue my observations, is, that by having a particular system of politics I shall be better able to judge of the truth or falsehood of any prevarication which I hear, or read, and of the justice, or the contrary, of any political transactions. Moreover, by comparing my own system with those of others, and with particular facts, I shall have it in my power to correct and improve it continually.²⁰

The mature Hazlitt is perhaps less confident of having a 'system' of politics to be applied to a world he had now found fiercely resistant to abstract principles; but 'the chief reason' for continuing his observations remained the same. His early interest in philosophy also gives us an abstract version of what was to preoccupy him in his political writings. When Hazlitt wrote about philosophy he saw his subject as divided already into two main schools. The first of these he called 'modern philosophy', which grew out of the empirical tradition in British philosophy, inspired by Bacon, founded by Hobbes, and popularised by Locke. Hazlitt opposed this school in philosophy with a less well-defined tradition which he called the 'philosophy of commonsense'. He claimed that philosophy should

be 'little more than common sense *well understood*'.²¹ He opposed the modern school by objecting to its treatment of human beings as though they were objects of science. His own philosophy tries to take account of imagination, passion, prejudice and all those elements which go to make up the concept of personality. This matches exactly his later objections to abstract political principles which do not use all the resources of personal persuasion to argue their case. To do this was only commonsense for Hazlitt. However he was equally critical of the powers of imagination, passion and prejudice when these are unconnected to any principle of truth. When pursued exclusively, prejudices and principles are equally pernicious. Hazlitt thought that when poets distort they do so through passion and prejudice, philosophers through abstract principles with no human content.

Hazlitt claimed that modern philosophy had diminished our awareness of the self and of the complexity of human personality. Although Bacon's emphasis on the need for systematic scientific observation 'was the most needed at the time

mind has, for a good while past, been in some danger of being overlaid by matter...We...have given up our own existence as a nonentity.²²

That is why in *The Spirit of the Age*, Hazlitt's masterpiece, he conducts us through a gallery of portraits where individual biography can be used as a focus for historical explanation. Each of the characters we meet - poet, novelist, philosopher, politician, clergyman - becomes a lens through which Hazlitt can show us the forms of the larger historical forces shaping his time. He is fascinated by the degree to which these selves, personalities, biographies stand out from or are absorbed by their historical background. His pointed, colourful commentary on the subjects of his portraiture reveal how they tried to ignore or stand against the main historical movement of their time, or else gave themselves up entirely to its abstract spirit, giving up their own individual existence 'as a nonentity'. Both attitudes reflect equally the failure to harmonize an abstract view of man, egalitarian and democratic, with an understanding of that private, passionate self in which we all differ and all desire to express ourselves differently and powerfully. To return to Hazlitt's terminology of translation, neither of these versions taken on their own do justice to their original. Hazlitt thought that the spirit of the age encouraged a purely abstract view of man. The French Revolution and the modern philosophy brought about a disintegration in the concept of human personality. Elsewhere, in his dramatic criticism, he describes how,

Our attention has been turned, by the current of events, to the general nature of men and things...We participate in the general progress of intellect, and the large vicissitudes of human affairs; but the hugest private sorrow looks dwarfish and puerile...In a word, literature and criticism have abstracted man from himself so far, that his existence is no longer *dramatic*.²³

We have seen how in Hazlitt's own writings we gain a dramatic sense of the private self at those moments when he feels that his egalitarian principles concerning 'the general nature of men and things' are threatened. His irritability registers this paradox. But he thought that the poets of his age concentrated on the private, passionate side of personality at the expense of democratic beliefs. Bentham and Godwin show the abstract bias, Coleridge, Wordsworth and others are the egotists. Hazlitt believed that after the French Revolution 'The Spirit of the monarchy' was at variance with the spirit of the age. The differing reactions of poets and

philosophers to this betrayal of progress reveals the fragmentation of the contemporary psyche. It is his greatest and unnoticed tribute to Coleridge at the end of his literary portrait to paint him living on his own, a mysterious figure, an intellectual bedouin owing no final allegiance to either of the divided camps of the human personality, philosophers or poets, an estranged, isolated but self-sufficient figure.

It was a misfortune to any man of talent to be born in the latter end of the last century...The spirit of the monarchy was at variance with the spirit of the age...The philosophers, the dry abstract reasoners, submitted to this reverse pretty well, and armed themselves with patience 'as with triple steel' to bear discomfiture, persecution, and disgrace. But the poets, the creatures of sympathy, could not stand the frowns both of king and people. They did not like to be shut out when places and pensions, when the critic's praises, and the laurel wreath were about to be distributed. They did not stomach being *sent to Coventry*, and Mr. Coleridge sounded a retreat for them by the help of casuistry and a musical voice. - 'His words were hollow, but they pleased the ear' of his friends of the Lake School, who turned back disgusted and panic-struck from the dry desert of unpopularity, like Hassan the camel-driver,

'And curs'd the hour, and curs'd the luckless day,
When first from Shiraz' walls they bent their way.

They are safely inclosed there. But Mr. Coleridge did not enter with them; pitching his tent upon the barren waste without, and having no abiding place nor city of refuge!²⁴

The Spirit of the Age was composed over the period 1821-4, and during that time Hazlitt also managed to provide an indelible (at least for his enemies) portrait of himself. In it they found him ridiculous and self-indulgent, the 'fool of love'. Hazlitt appears ridiculous in *Liber Amoris* only because he describes with unflinching precision the difference between his love and its object. He does to himself in this book what he was to do to his contemporaries in *The Spirit of the Age*; only in this case the individual does not disintegrate under the pressure of the spirit of his age but under the passion of love. He desperately tries to find in Sarah Walker some sign that his passion is justified. Hazlitt portrays himself seeing the world through the partial, delusive vision of love; surrendering his individuality to the passion, allowing it to alienate him from his true self.

I am tossed about (backwards and forwards) by my passion, so as to become ridiculous. I can now understand how it is that mad people never remain in the same place - they are moving on forever, *from themselves!*²⁵

Hazlitt italicizes the words '*from themselves!*'. The headlong career of the obsession he describes both originates in himself, and so is '*from*' himself in that sense; but it also dissociates and divides his personality and shows him 'moving on' from himself.

Hazlitt describes the world seen through the eyes of the lover. But since the world is not identical with the version or translation which the lover constructs it can never satisfy him fully. 'The noble scenery in this country mixes with my passion, and refines, but does not relieve it.' Only momentarily does he find a suitable correlative in natural scenery for his

agony. Then Hazlitt's language becomes subtly expressive. He writes that, 'The sky is marble to my thoughts; nature is dead around me, as hope is within me.' The first phrase, 'The sky is marble to my thoughts' is a telling one. The smooth cold touch of marble suggests both an unblemished sky and the unrelenting weight of his passion pressing down on him from above. The description presents nature in a way that does no violence to it while also managing to suggest the unnatural power of Hazlitt's obsession. But this is only a momentary success as the rest of the sentence deliberately degenerates into the commonplaces of infatuation - 'nature is dead around me, as hope is within me.' At another point he finds that, 'The air is too thin for me, that has not the breath of love in it; that is not embalmed by her sighs.'²⁶ Here his use of language again rewards study. In an essay on *Sir Walter Scott, Racine, and Shakespeare* Hazlitt describes the linguistic power he is now displaying: 'But words are a key to the affections. They not only excite feelings, but they point to the *why* and *wherefore*.'²⁷ So in the sentence from *Liber Amoris* 'embalmed' can suggest the lover's sensation of the air as made balmy, sweet-smelling by her sighs. But the word also reflects on the debilitating nature of Hazlitt's own passion, the living death within which his hopeless love for Sarah preserves him, suspending his better nature in a kind of madness. His mania is like a disease, aberrant and self-perpetuating. Hazlitt cries out, 'She has robbed me of herself: shall she also rob me of my love of her?' His passion does not need a sustaining object. The disparity between what he feels and what is returned to him by the original source of that feeling only makes him love the stronger. Paradox once more is at the root of this most irritable passion of his life. But when he writes *Liber Amoris* he has, as far as one can, controlled his obsession and distanced it. The book is subtitled 'The New Pygmalion': Hazlitt wants us to be conscious of a presiding artistic as well as a cathartic motive in his writing. He wants us to see a man creating a living image of perfect love which we know is fabulous and deceitful. He wants to place his infatuated character in 'a moral and intellectual perspective'. The Hazlitt he describes may be blindly immersed in the passion of the moment, but the author of *Liber Amoris* is not. It is his use of language which shows he is in control because, as he wrote in his essay on *Sir Walter Scott, Racine, and Shakespeare*,

The thought or impression of the moment is one thing, and it may be more or less delightful; but beyond this, it may relate to the fate or events of a whole life, and it is this moral and intellectual perspective that words convey in its full signification and extent...²⁸

The subject of Hazlitt's most personal portrait and most disinterested judgement was himself.

(Based on a lecture given by Dr Hamilton to the Charles Lamb Society on 2nd December 1978.)

Footnotes

- 1 *The Works of Charles and Mary Lamb*, ed. E V Lucas (London, 1903-5, 1912), 6 vols, 1, 274.
- 2 *The Complete Works of William Hazlitt*, ed. P P Howe (London, 1930-4), 21 vols.

- 3 *The Letters of Charles Lamb to which are added those of his sister Mary Lamb*, ed. E V Lucas (London, 1935), 3 vols, II, 196.
- 4 *The Letters of John Keats*, ed. H E Rollins (Cambridge, Mass., 1958), 2 vols, I, 252.
- 5 *Works*, 17.311.
- 6 *Works*, 18.138, 16.195-6, 18.11, 10.130-1, 4.92, 12.250.
- 7 *Works*, 20.355, 388.
- 8 *Works*, 8.82.
- 9 *Works*, 20.348.
- 10 *Works*, 4.101, 12.129.
- 11 'The Forgotten Self', *The Partisan Review*, 30 (Summer 1963), 304.
- 12 *Works*, 8.89.
- 13 *Works*, 8.84.
- 14 *Letters*, I, 387.
- 15 *Works*, 19.143-4.
- 16 *Works*, 13.ix.
- 17 *Works*, 13.x.
- 18 *Works*, 13.17.
- 19 *Works*, 19.144.
- 20 W. Carew Hazlitt, *The Hazlitts: An Account of their Origin and Descent* (Edinburgh, 1911), 402-3.
- 21 *Works*, 2.289.
- 22 *Works*, 2.115.
- 23 *Works*, 18.304-5.
- 24 *Works*, 11.37-8.
- 25 *Works*, 9.130.
- 26 *Works*, 9.130, 125, 126.
- 27 *Works*, 12.337.
- 28 *Works*, 12.336.

JOHN CHUBB, A FRIEND OF COLERIDGE

Berta Lawrence

He was twenty-six years older than Coleridge who had a number of friends considerably senior to himself. Ten years before he met the young poet Chubb had been Mayor of his native Somerset town, Bridgwater. By the time of their first meeting in 1797 he was over fifty, a prominent burgess and a greatly respected, prosperous merchant. In his youth, he had spent some time in London, loved the animation and stimulus of city life, frequented the society of painters, looked at pictures, and soon proposed leaving his sleepy birthplace for good in order to become a painter. A hard-headed

father informed him that painting, like poetry, had too little money in it to be more than a spare-time occupation and installed John in the flourishing family business. Here he permanently remained so that his painting did indeed get relegated to his leisure hours. He carried camp-stool and sketch-book around the town and its surrounding fields, or made small portraits touched with colour of his friends and visitors - his house was known for its hospitality and musical evenings - and satirical little portraits of eccentric local characters observed in church or in their shops. Fortunately his son and descendants cherished a collection of these sketches. Less fortunately it contains no portrait of Coleridge.

His warehouse and business premises stood on a quayside near the tidal river Parret whose waters were, and still are, ale-brown with the mud brought in with every tide. In seasons of very high tides the river must have flooded his warehouse as it still does, occasionally (in spite of 20th century river-management) the modern shops on the site, in a side-street now named Binford Place. Modern pollution has banished the salmon that in John Chubb's time swam upriver from the estuary. Banished too are the boats that for centuries used this busy river-port, banished so finally that there is a scheme in hand for turning the old docks into an 'amenity area'. Decline was rapid after World War II. But John Chubb looking out of his office saw, and sometimes sketched, the masts of tall ships from many countries, crowded below the triple-arched stone bridge, ships whose cargoes often furnished wares for his business such as Jamaica rum, Spanish wines, Scandinavian timber, French ribbons and paduasos. We have his interesting and detailed sketch of the stout medieval bridge over which traffic passed to the remoter West Country. It was demolished in 1795, and Coleridge saw the installation of a graceful iron bridge cast by the firm Abraham Darby of Coalbrookdale. Southey, a thorough conservationist, deplored the replacement of the familiar stone bridge by 'an ugly new iron bridge' in 1797. Another of Chubb's sketches shows his warehouse-front, the cobbled quayside with little boats tied up, the massive stonework of the bridge. Two men lean negligently against barrels on the quayside. This section of street is still recognisable although like Chubb's property the cobblestones have disappeared as has, in fairly recent times, the adjacent Dolphin Inn known to many an 'ancient mariner'. On the corner nearest the bridge stood the Castle Inn with extensive stables where De Quincey may have put up his borrowed horse.

Chubb's house joined his business premises, its front facing Fore Street that runs at-right-angles to Binford Place (then called Back Quay). The town gaol stood next to Chubb's house. Shops now cover all the sites. Chubb's house possessed a stone gateway and when young De Quincey came seeking Coleridge one summer evening in 1807 he observed a man standing beneath it, a man in his middle thirties and grown rather stout, whom he nevertheless identified as the poet he wished to meet because he looked lost in a daydream and had great grey eyes shining with a peculiar light. The title of Virginia Woolf's essay 'Man under a Gate' refers to Coleridge standing in John Chubb's gateway. De Quincey himself must have stood on the opposite side of the street, near the inn called the Bridgwater Arms that closed a few years ago. Coleridge stayed there at least once and wrote in his Notebook that all its linen was marked 'Stolen from the Bridgwater Arms'. Southey stayed there and complained in a letter that the landlord refused to serve him tea in the evening because spirits were much more profitable.

We have De Quincey's own account of this encounter with Coleridge at John Chubb's in 1807 when he himself was twenty-one. He was staying at Hotwells Spa near Bristol when he learnt that Coleridge, whose work he fervently admired, was visiting his great friend Thomas Poole, the Nether Stowey tanner. He set out on a walk of forty-odd miles to find him and outside Bridgwater cut off several miles by using the Parret ferry (now vanished) that the Wordsworths and Coleridge sometimes used, as Dorothy Wordsworth tells us. Poole offered him hospitality until Coleridge should return from a visit to Enmore Castle, home of the Earl of Egmont. Lord Egmont was a brother of Spencer Perceval, the Prime Minister whose later assassination so greatly shocked Coleridge. He drove over the Quantock Hills to Poole's with a gift of snuff for Coleridge who, he said, had left Enmore to visit John Chubb 'for one night'. Like Poole he was familiar with Coleridge's total unreliability. De Quincey became impatient and borrowed a horse from Poole to ride eight miles into Bridgwater. And there he found Coleridge day-dreaming under Chubb's gateway. Coleridge welcomed him warmly, took him into Chubb's house as if it were his own, rang for refreshments, made his usual tireless and brilliant conversation and, when Mrs Coleridge put in a brief appearance, uttered a few stiff words of introduction.

Later that sunny June evening he conducted De Quincey round the small agricultural town of 3000 inhabitants that has industrialised itself during the last forty years, its population now having increased tenfold. People greeted Coleridge with great friendliness as he showed his visitor the most notable of their buildings all reigned over by the noble church of St Mary the Virgin where Chubb had been baptised and now lies buried in a lost grave. Chubb made sketches of several buildings whose appearance, but for him, would now be unknown, for example, the remains of the four town gates, the Castle ruins, the ruined Constable's House, the Market Cross, the 'island' of shops in the middle of the High Street.

Coleridge took De Quincey back to supper with the Chubb family. De Quincey found an atmosphere of cordiality and warmth, a table where animated conversation flowed happily, although held up at times by Coleridge's brilliant monologues, and an appreciation of music and the arts as well as keen interest in politics. Chubb had three young children: Charles James, named after his close friend Fox, the Whig minister; Morley, and Lucy aged thirteen whom Mrs Coleridge alluded to in a letter to Tom Poole in 1822, when she requested him somewhat coyly to 'congratulate Miss Chubb on her change of name'.

De Quincey walked back to Bristol through the starlit night, unable to forget Coleridge's eloquence and arresting personality. He had sensed tragedy when Coleridge warned him about the dangers of 'opium-eating'. Some time later he sent Coleridge £300 as a gift.

Ten years had elapsed since Coleridge's first contact with John Chubb. He had changed enormously in the interval. In 1797 he had been a hot-headed, idealistic young revolutionary, full of lofty aspirations and imaginative projects. Living in poverty in Nether Stowey he had been helped by Tom Poole who shared the 'democratic' opinions that made both of them, and Wordsworth, so suspect locally and even in Government quarters. Poole introduced him to liberal-minded John Chubb, a Whig, who supported Fox and was Fox's personal friend so that Fox even invited Chubb to dine discreetly with him at Piper's Inn outside Bridgwater when Fox brought his dearly loved mistress Mrs Armistead with him (later she became his wife). In 1780 Chubb had been entrusted with a petition against George III's abuses of the

constitution; in 1785 he had organised locally a petition to Parliament against the slave trade.

However, in spite of shared opinions, the twenty-five year old poet found that both Poole and Chubb had cooler heads than himself. When Thelwall the notorious Jacobin visited Coleridge in 1797, Coleridge hoped that Poole would find a Somerset cottage for Thelwall. The ever-generous Poole refused since such action would jeopardise his own local work for poorer people and even his own position. The impulsive Coleridge promised Thelwall to approach Chubb for help. He made his first effort when footsore after walking to Bridgwater from Bristol; it was Assize Week and Chubb's house was full of people, Chubb unapproachable. 'I will write to him. I will transmit to you his answer' wrote Coleridge to Thelwall before finishing his 41-mile walk to Stowey. Eventually he had to transmit with great regret the reply that Chubb would only find a home for Thelwall if Tom Poole approved - and Poole did not.

Even Coleridge came to realise the existence of intense spy-mania in the Somerset coastal region. 'The aristocrats persecute even Wordsworth'.



One of these aristocrats was Sir Philip Hale, a wealthy landowner living a few miles outside Nether Stowey, the 'titled Dogberry' as Coleridge called him who was responsible for reporting Wordsworth's movements. John Chubb made a portrait sketch of him, a soured lugubrious face.

Chubb's young son Morley was at a Nether Stowey boarding school kept by Coleridge's friend, the Cornish curate Thomas Roskilly. In a letter to his father, Morley reported corn riots among Stowey labourers when Sir Philip Hale's men 'took the corn away', for rustic poverty was extreme in this area where Wordsworth found such subjects as 'The Last of the Flock'.

The various small but intensely vivid portraits left by this 18th-century Somerset merchant include several of his family members, his aged father Jonathan, his two vivacious sisters, an adorably pretty wife, and several

self-portraits of a generous intelligent face - one of these is 'Self Portrait with Artist's Paraphernalia'. With relevance to Coleridge there are portraits of the handsome Lord Egmont and of his hook-nosed agent William Cruickshank whose son John, the earl's Stowey agent, was friend and neighbour of the young Coleridges. (His baby girl Anna was the subject of Coleridge's poem 'On the Christening of a Friend's Child'). There is a portrait of Thomas Pyke, one of the chief Trustees of the Unitarian church in Bridgwater when Coleridge preached there.

There is a portrait of William Pitt. And a portrait of 'Master Crotch' a little boy wearing a lace collar who became the distinguished organist and Oxford Professor of Music, William Crotch. His early years were spent travelling round England as a child-prodigy with his Mama. He gave recitals in scores of towns as well as to the royal family at Buckingham House. His West Country tours brought him to Bath, Bridgwater and Taunton playing organ and a little violin specially made for him. The musical John Chubb undoubtedly went to hear him play. This little boy got down on the floor to draw with chalks when fatigued by his recitals. John Chubb would sympathise!

A large number of John Chubb's sketches are on indefinite loan to the Blake Museum, Bridgwater, through the generosity of the Chubb family.

NB A number of charming water-colour sketches made by William Crotch in later years are in the Victoria and Albert Museum.

BOOK REVIEWS

John Beer: *Wordsworth and the Human Heart*: London: Macmillan, 1978. pp.xx, 277, £10.

John Beer: *Wordsworth in Time*: London: Faber and Faber, 1979. pp.232. £8.50.

With what lively anticipation did we greet the arrival on our editorial desk of not one but two books by John Beer - and on Wordsworth! What, we wondered, would be the impact when, in order to engage with, in Robert Langbaum's phrase, "the poetry of experience" characteristic of Wordsworth, Dr Beer "perhaps the best living Coleridge scholar" should turn away from Coleridge's "abstruser musings"? Well, of course, the answer is that he does not so turn away, for in both books he is dealing largely, though not exclusively, with "what Thomas McFarland has termed the 'Wordsworth - Coleridge Symbiosis'". Indeed, who could be better qualified than John Beer to examine this ever-enthralling intellectual relationship?

In *Wordsworth and the Human Heart* Dr Beer deals primarily with Wordsworth's concern with "the question of human relationships", while in *Wordsworth in Time* he concentrates on the philosophical topics of "the mind's relationship to nature, knowledge of one's own mind", different concepts of time and timelessness and the human predicament seen in the light of these concerns. Like other recent critics, Dr Beer sees the key to Wordsworth's poetry in a form of inner conflict. He sees him as torn between conflicting views of the world and contradictory aspects of his own nature and attempting to reconcile seemingly irreconcilable opposites, which for a short time the influence of Coleridge's ideas enabled him to do. On the one hand was the Newtonian universe, an efficient but cold machine, subject to strict law and so, in a sense, consoling in its orderliness, yet inhuman; while on the other was the warmth and spontaneity of passion and the aspiration of transcendental vision, the very essence of life and yet holding within them

the threat of chaos and madness. If no satisfactory resolution could be found he would find himself poised between opposing nightmares.

In *Wordsworth and the Human Heart* Dr Beer shows how changes in the connotations of the word "heart" have made it difficult for the modern reader to appreciate the meanings it had for Wordsworth. For him, the "human heart" indicated "one area of the human psyche in which the conflict seemed less pressing" between these opposites, "one space which seemed exempt from their contradictions". For the new science had demonstrated "a little model of dynamic order within the body to match that to be discovered in the universe at large"; yet, while the human heart was central to the physical mechanism and the maintenance of order, it was also a field for emotional aspiration and "a place of refuge". It provided the link both with nature and with other human beings and, by its own demonstration of "the life-process itself", indicated "that despite the essential inhumanity of the universe a principle of mercy was also at work". At this point, one wished for a better knowledge of physiology! For John Beer goes on to describe how in some circumstances "the looked for englobulation will not take place: instead it will find itself caught in an unending vortex. Under the pulse of uncompleted passion all experience may be for a time more vivid, but eventually some displacement must take place, some closure, to give necessary relief". John Beer sees "many of Wordsworth's greatest writings...as embodying such an experience", notably some of the "spots of time" in *The Prelude*. But, "in other cases...where the vortex was one of impossible love or ineluctable grief, the displacement could never be more than partial". The reader has to come to terms with this difficult concept, as the images used in the rest of the book depend upon it. For example, after tracing Wordsworth's life and work up to the meeting with Coleridge, he speaks of *The Borderers* as registering "the uneasy tension at this time" between the frustrated "impulse to glory" and "the impulse to love of humankind which was fostered by Dorothy's quickness of sympathy, but which was always englobing itself into a static moon of contemplated pathos".

Nevertheless, the reading of certain poems in the light of this picture of the human heart can be enormously rewarding. Dr Beer relates it, of course, to the influence of Coleridge. First, he traces in the revision of *Salisbury Plain* the alteration in Wordsworth, which he attributes to Coleridge rather than to Dorothy, from the desire for "social change by direct action" to the need for individual "human beings generally to develop sympathetic states of mind". There is, he points out, "no denunciation of the social order in *The Ruined Cottage*". Those ideas of Coleridge at this time of which we have read in the earlier books *Coleridge the Visionary* and *Coleridge's Poetic Intelligence* found "a ready listener" in Wordsworth. We have seen how Coleridge, in his reading of certain Neoplatonists and of Boehme, found "a view of the universe which presupposed a set of correspondences between the deepest forces at work in it and those of the human heart". The imagery of the fountain in relation to the human heart suggested spontaneity as opposed to the "analytic and detached powers of the mind" and also a relationship to the new discoveries about electrical and animal magnetism, which might provide evidence of an actual not merely metaphorical "bond between living things". Coleridge's theories "allowed for a work of nature at a level of consciousness below normal thinking" and provided a ground for Wordsworth's visionary experiences and for his concern for humanity.

Dr Beer's discussion of *Lyrical Ballads* in the light of these ideas is most

exciting, both as to individual poems and as to the overall tone of the volume and its unifying principle. He says of "Wordsworth's main contributions - that they are the productions of a man whose vision of ordinary human life has been changed by his own glimpses of the agonies of desolation and who has learned to see the ordinary charities between man and man as oases in a world which would otherwise be no more than a desert of law and necessity. If they were *simply* that, however, they would hardly be the poems that we know." If, in one's ignorance, one's first impulse is to protest, "why not? isn't that enough? are charities so ordinary?" one is soon beguiled when he goes on to show how many of the poems "are brushed by the wing of Coleridge's further speculations at some point and show the effects in their structure". By reference to such of Coleridge's ideas as the "primary and secondary consciousness", the "connection between the primary consciousness and the warmth-sense of the body", the relationship between the heart-fountain and the gush of tears or the spring, or the "fluxes and refluxes" of human and cosmic magnetisms, for example, John Beer manages to give many of the poems quite a new dimension. He writes particularly well, I think, on the two versions of *Animal Tranquility and Decay*. I have long felt, uneasily, that "the poem gains a new dimension from the original ending", uneasily because as an artefact it is undoubtedly better without it. But John Beer is not afraid to admit what is lost by omitting it and he is able to define that loss.

Of the *Lyrical Ballads* as a whole John Beer says, "If attention is focused objectively upon the human beings presented there, an interesting and rewarding reading results, but it is also hard to resist a sense of sombreness". This is less likely if the reader recognizes "beneath the stark presentations of predicament...another, subtler work in progress, a groundswell of suggestions concerning the 'living universe'". This, he maintains, is what gives the collection, including Coleridge's contributions, its dominant unifying tone.

He shows the relevance of Coleridge's view of the human heart and "the one life" to both *Tintern Abbey* and the *Intimations Ode*, which "owes its peculiarly rewarding and complex quality to the presence of forces which were set in motion by the impact of Coleridge's ideas. Without such radiances and excitations his verse was liable to fall into a more sober and stately march". To a large extent the rest of the book is devoted to showing how "in some respects this is precisely what did happen in subsequent years, as the influence of Coleridge's powers faded" but also how far "the *whole* achievement in it continued to exert a power over his later career as well".

Wordsworth had always been aware of "the intractability...of suffering" and there came a time when his "poetic universe failed him completely". His withdrawal from "the interpretative world which he had developed during and after his intimacy with Coleridge" was, of course, neither total nor sudden. "The events of 1812-13 were like a landslide which has long been foreshadowed by shifts and cracks." In man's travel along the road "between life and death", Coleridge's "notion of the 'one life' was of consolatory power" but "in the end...his own vision stressed the emblematic status of the road itself and the lonely travellers who passed along it", their dignity and pathos "when seen moving in isolation against a great landscape". Nevertheless, "within a recognition of that basic condition, there was room for frequent pleasure and delight in nature". Where Coleridge emphasizes imagery of ebullience, Wordsworth stresses images of space and

time, such as the river with its parallel in "the unconscious, hardly-perceived work of the bloodstream in the body". Dr Beer illuminates the Westminster Bridge sonnet in this context and shows how London as "a mighty heart" is no cliché, the language of the poem turning out to have "unexpected preciseness". His elucidation of this should not be missed by any lover of Wordsworth's poetry. Comparisons are made with Hardy, with Lawrence (at intervals throughout the book) and with Blake. Perhaps, John Beer suggests, what Blake did not appreciate was the extent to which Wordsworth could *not* "afford to suffer, / With those whom he saw suffer". "It was precisely because the emotional area between pulse and englobulation could be rendered so agonizing by his own engagement and responsibility that he needed to catch the whole up into a larger sense of ebb and flow, accompanied by a devotion to peace which Blake would regard as disablingly quietist."

In *Wordsworth in Time* Dr Beer sees Wordsworth as a kind of instance of Eliot's "dissociated sensibility" but the split is on a deeper level, because the two elements unreconciled, "the rational and the subliminal", are different in kind. Signals of this are disturbances in Wordsworth's diction, the unexpected word or even the apparent absurdity. This conflict is closely bound up with different concepts of time; as evolutionary spiral or as a nightmare of cyclical repetition on a wheel of necessity; as "ever-rolling stream", carrying with it moments of crisis or opportunity, or as "a self-renewing spring". Much of the discussion of the influence of Coleridge's thought on Wordsworth covers similar ground to that in the other book but with a different reference. From the despondency of an obsession with "mechanical and deathly processes in the universe", Coleridge's "esoteric speculations" offered healing and hope, "placing death in a context of life, rather than life in a context of death". From the fear of madness associated with his experiences "out of time" or in "direct communication with nature", Coleridge's ideas also delivered him, suggesting that perhaps he really was in a beneficial way in touch with an active force in the universe which could transcend time. From "the final nightmare of a totally static universe" and the sense of mortality and loss in individual human life, perhaps too there was relief after all. "Perhaps if human beings perceived fully, the harmony which is sometimes glimpsed in moments of entrancement would engulf the universe, showing the bewildering phenomena of life and death to be simply the flux and reflux of a larger cosmic animation", as, for example, Dr Beer finds them in the Lucy poems; though he suggests that, later, Wordsworth retreated from "sublime speculation" and "that the irreconcilability of the two states of consciousness described was becoming the more compelling fact".

Coleridge's theory of "the primary consciousness" and his interest in and then abandonment of the notions of hypnotism and animal magnetism also affected Wordsworth and the changes in his poetry, as the questions of "genius, poetic creation and the development of human perception" took their place. Dr Beer gives us a fascinating reading of *To Joanna*, among other close criticisms of varying degrees of persuasiveness, and returns to *Tintern Abbey* and the *Intimations Ode* in this new context.

Against the manic-depressive fear expressed, for example, in *Resolution and Independence* Wordsworth put up the defence of that matter-of-factness that Coleridge complained of and concentrated on "the permanent in nature itself" and "human fortitude", as we see for example in *Michael*. His later conservatism is largely explained by his desire to preserve these, as he

settled into the "final duality...between duty and affection, the rock and the fountain". Despite the stereotype of the later Wordsworth as Victorian sage, in fact he was exempt from the worst faults of that period, its concentration on the will at the expense of spontaneity, its repression of the life-force within. "Whatever the merits of the fountain as an image for the human heart, it was at least a better model than the piston."

In his Introduction to *Wordsworth in Time*, John Beer says, "It is no part of my purpose to argue for Coleridge's superiority... Despite the attention given to Coleridge in the early chapters, the hero of this book is intended to be Wordsworth". In both books this intention is carried through and, on the whole, a sympathetic and balanced picture of Wordsworth emerges. One can hardly miss, however, a rather endearing tendency to see Coleridge as "rescuing" Wordsworth's poems from being, variously, "sentimental", "a sober and stately march" or "static emblems of pathos". In relation to *Tintern Abbey* Dr Beer says, "A morality of affection which is still dangerously near the sentimental" is given "a stiffening of intellectual support" by Coleridge's theory of "the one life". One cannot help feeling that there are underlying assumptions here which may indeed be sound but which could be questioned.

There were moments, too, when one felt a mild dissent. For example, on pages 73-4 of *Wordsworth in Time*. For, though there is much in F W Bateson's work as a whole to earn our deep respect, he is surely least reliable in the psychological assumptions he makes about Wordsworth, based on dubious biographical data. So it surprises one to find John Beer giving house-room to Bateson's theory that the stolen boat incident took place on the way to stay with Wordsworth's unpleasant guardian at Penrith and that "the disturbances described could be associated with his father's death". Yet Wordsworth himself says in Ms. V that he was "By chance in travel to my father's house", so, though it may have been via Penrith, as the boat was at Patterdale, his journey was surely eventually to Cockermouth and in his father's lifetime.

But these are small matters. While there is necessarily some going over of old ground, inevitable in tracing Wordsworth's development and summarizing the matter of Beer's earlier books on Coleridge, this is beautifully done. One has the sense of one's previous knowledge of the subject being pulled together and given shape by a fine mind. Moreover, it is not just a chewing over of the old vexed question of when and for how long Wordsworth shared Coleridge's concept of "the one life". There are new lights on the thoughts they discussed together. But the real originality of the books is in the re-interpretation of some of Wordsworth's poems in the light of Coleridge's theories. Here, sometimes reluctantly abandoning cherished views, one is fired by the excitement of a new reading, much as Wordsworth must have been inspired by the conversation of Coleridge. Yes, these are inspiring books, genuinely original without being either *outré* in thought or incomprehensible in language, a rare phenomenon in to-day's critical climate. Our lively anticipation on opening them was not disappointed.

M W

THE ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

The annual report and accounts were considered at an AGM held on 5 May. The effect of inflation had been met last year by a decision to raise, from 1 January 1979, the rate of subscriptions for corporate members only. Further financial support was required, however, and it was resolved that personal

subscriptions should be increased from 1 January 1980 as follows:

London members	(present £2.50)	£3.00	(couples £4.00)
Provincial	(present £1.50)	£2.00	(couples £3.00)
Overseas	(present \$5.00)	\$7.00	(couples \$10.00)

It was reported that the Hon. Secretary had resigned, with effect from the AGM. The meeting expressed great appreciation of his services to the Society, and resolved that he should be appointed a Vice-President. Mrs Madeleine Huxstep was appointed Hon. Secretary in his place. A vote of thanks also went to Mrs H Lehane, who retired from the Council and was replaced by Miss M Berry. The resignation of Mr Basil Savage as Editor of the Bulletin was accepted.

The meeting accepted proposals for lectures for the 1979-80 session, arrangements for which had now been completed. One of the talks was to be on Enfield and Edmonton in Lamb's day, and it was decided that this should be followed by a visit to the Lamb sites in those places. Arrangements for the Annual Birthday Luncheon on 9 February 1980 were also discussed: it is to be held at Simpson's-in-the-Strand as usual. The Chairman reported that arrangements for the transfer of the Society's collection of books to the Guildhall Library were proceeding. A formal agreement would be signed shortly, and physical transfer would take place soon thereafter. A note would be included in the Bulletin informing members how the books may be consulted, and giving directions for the return of any books borrowed from Edmonton which may still be in the hands of members.

B S

As Basil Savage kindly reported on the Annual General Meeting, his own resignation as Editor of the Bulletin receives there a bare mention. As members know, I had hoped to hand the post back to him after his two-year sabbatical break but, although he is, I hope and think, very much better in health, he did not feel that he could undertake this task at present. It would be a sad day that saw him sever his link completely and I very much hope that he will not do so but will continue to give me his support. Members will know what a very great deal he has done both for the Society as a whole and for the Bulletin in particular and I am sure we would all wish to thank him very warmly and to hope for his continued restoration to full health.

M W

Miss Reeves requests please that anyone having old copies of the Annual Reports for 1970 and 1971 be kind enough to send them to her.

THE ANNUAL CROWSLEY MEMORIAL LECTURE

This year's Ernest Crowsley Memorial Lecture will be given on October 6th at 2.45 pm at the Mary Ward Centre, 9 Tavistock Place, London WC1. The speaker will be Professor Angus Easson of Salford University.

NEW MEMBERS

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