WILLIAM HAZLITT

TABLE TALK

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Enriched edition. Essays on Men and Manners

Introduction, Studies and Commentaries by Jackson Price

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Introduction

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This collection presents William Hazlitt’s Table Talk in its original scope: two volumes of essays first issued in 1821 and 1822. It is not a complete works nor a miscellany from across his career, but a coherent series conceived for publication as a set of original essays. The pieces gathered here range widely, yet they belong to a single undertaking that tests ideas in a personal, critical voice. Readers will find meditations on art, literature, society, and conduct, arranged in a sequence that allows themes to unfold, recur, and sharpen, with several subjects pursued across paired essays and the closing fragment noted as such.

This is a book of essays: familiar essays, critical essays, portraits, and occasional travel writing. There are no poems, plays, or letters, and nothing here pretends to be dialogue or diary, despite the convivial title. Instead the conversational promise is fulfilled in prose that addresses the reader directly while weighing examples. Hazlitt writes about painting in the opening essays, literature in pieces such as On Milton’s Sonnets, and experience in On Going a Journey. He turns to public life in On Coffee-House Politicians and returns to first principles in reflections like On the Fear of Death.

Across both volumes, the essays take as their field the relations between thought and feeling, principle and practice, the solitary mind and the crowd. Questions of genius and common sense, paradox and common-place,

vulgarity and affectation, are examined not to settle doctrine but to clarify taste and conduct. In art and letters, Hazlitt probes authority by testing first-hand response: he reassesses Sir Joshua Reynolds’s Discourses, considers a landscape by Nicolas Poussin, honors the force of Milton’s sonnets, and weighs the picturesque against the ideal. The result is criticism inseparable from experience, and experience disciplined by criticism.

Table Talk exemplifies Hazlitt’s familiar style: animated, plain yet exact, rich in antithesis, and propelled by illustration rather than quotation or system. The essays’ title signals conversational ease; the execution shows a mind arguing with itself in public, drawing images from the studio, the theatre, the road, and the coffee-house. He relishes distinctions without pedantry, and energy without haste. Even when surveying abstractions, he fastens on particulars, favoring the concrete instance that makes a general claim felt. His sentences balance pressure and poise, sustaining a rhythm that encourages assent, dissent, and—above all—active participation from the reader.

Public questions enter by way of character and custom. On Corporate Bodies, On the Aristocracy of Letters, On Patronage and Puffing, and On Criticism trace how institutions shape reputation, speech, and judgment. Hazlitt is attentive to the claims of talent and the distortions of power, wary of collective pretence and of solitary vanity alike. In Coffee-House Politicians he registers the life of opinion at street level; in the disadvantages of intellectual superiority he notes the costs of thinking against the grain.

The essays do not legislate policy; they cultivate independence of mind and a scrupulous sense of fairness.

Much of the collection is a laboratory of character. The study of Cobbett observes force as a social fact; On People with One Idea and On the Ignorance of the Learned weigh focus against breadth; The Indian Jugglers treats skill as a moral spectacle. Introspection and habit are tested in On Living to One’s-Self, On Thought and Action, and On Will-Making, while On the Knowledge of Character and Why Distant Objects Please examine the faculties by which we judge and desire. These inquiries combine self-portraiture with observation, finding in ordinary motives the seeds of enduring principles.

Table Talk remains central to Hazlitt’s achievement because it unites criticism, autobiography, and social reflection in a single performing voice. Its two-volume architecture encourages both sequential reading and free sampling, letting arguments echo across topics and time. The fragment on the picturesque and ideal reminds us that periodical writing need not be tidy to be exact. Returning to these essays today, readers meet a writer who trusts experience, prizes clarity, and refuses cant. The subjects belong to painting, poetry, travel, politics, and mortality; the method belongs to the familiar essay, whose standards this collection helped to define.

Historical Context

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Table Talk appeared in London in two volumes between 1821–1822, when the periodical press and conversational essay thrived. Hazlitt, already a prominent reviewer for metropolitan journals such as the Examiner and the London Magazine, reworked pieces first written for those venues into reflective dialogues with the public. The title evokes eighteenth-century sociability, yet the book speaks to a tense Regency present shaped by the Queen Caroline affair (1820) and the aftermath of Peterloo (1819). Its mixture of art criticism, psychology, and manners allowed Hazlitt to address politics obliquely, couching radical sympathies in discussions of taste, character, and the uses of conversation.

The political climate after the Napoleonic Wars (ending 1815) strongly inflected these essays. Tory ministries tightened control through the Six Acts (1819) after mass reform agitation, and the failed Cato Street plot (1820) intensified suspicion of radicals. Hazlitt, formed by the Unitarian dissenting tradition and educated at the revolutionary New College, Hackney in the 1790s, prized liberty of conscience and empirical reasoning. That background informs recurrent attacks on cant, corporate privilege, and intellectual timidity in pieces on vulgarity, paradox, and corporate bodies. His portraits, including the ambivalent ‘Character of Cobbett,’ weigh the energies of

popular radicalism against the risks of demagoguery in a censorious, litigious public sphere.

Hazlitt wrote as a trained painter who had visited the Louvre during the Peace of Amiens in 1802, studying Old Masters newly assembled by Napoleonic conquest. This firsthand discipline grounds essays on the pleasure of painting, Poussin, and the picturesque versus the ideal. In post-Waterloo London, the Royal Academy—shaped by Sir Joshua Reynolds's Discourses (1769–1790)—dominated taste, yet public exhibitions broadened access and debate. Hazlitt's critiques of Reynolds's generalizations, and his praise of Poussin's structure and sobriety, joined ongoing British arguments launched by Gilpin, Uvedale Price, and Payne Knight. The essays mediate between connoisseurship and democratic spectatorship, querying authority while defending standards rooted in practice.

The London stage furnished another laboratory for Hazlitt's judgments. As drama critic for the Morning Chronicle from 1814, he watched the star system consolidate after the Old Price Riots (1809) at Covent Garden. Edmund Kean's meteoric rise from 1814 and the lingering prestige of John Philip Kemble reframed questions of celebrity, decorum, and the audience's rights. Debates over playhouse etiquette—whether actors should sit in the boxes—and management mirrored wider contests over hierarchy and public opinion. Hazlitt's theatrical experience sharpened his sense of performance in social life, feeding essays on affectation, familiar style, and criticism, and offering analogies for the tensions between individuality and institutional control.

The 1820s literary marketplace, expanded by steam-press printing and circulating libraries, reoriented reputations from aristocratic patronage to commercial visibility. Reviews in the Edinburgh Review (1802–), Quarterly Review (1809–), and Blackwood’s Magazine (1817–) policed cultural authority, while the New Monthly Magazine cultivated fashionable publicity. Hazlitt’s ‘On Criticism,’ ‘On the Aristocracy of Letters,’ and ‘On Patronage and Puffing’ scrutinize this economy, targeting paid puffery associated with aggressive publishers and retaliatory attacks like Blackwood’s ‘Cockney School’ campaigns against Keats, Hunt, and Hazlitt himself. The fatal duel of editor John Scott in 1821 dramatized how criticism could become partisan combat, shaping the essays’ wary, combative candor.

Urban sociability supplied both subject matter and method. Coffee-house rooms and tavern parlors along Fleet Street, Covent Garden, and the Strand still served as reading spaces for taxed newspapers and centers of political gossip. Hazlitt’s ‘On Coffee-house Politicians’ and ‘On Corporate Bodies’ anatomize how opinion forms amid habit, interest, and imposture, while ‘On Living to One’s-Self’ registers the countervailing desire for solitude and self-possession. His acute interest in physiognomy and moral psychology—honed in years of journalism and debate—underwrites ‘On the Knowledge of Character’ and allied pieces. The city’s ceaseless talk becomes a testing ground for distinguishing genuine judgment from conformity and noise.

Britain’s expanding empire and itinerant entertainments colored the era’s visual culture. After the East India Company’s 1813 Charter Act loosened trade monopolies, colonial commodities and performers circulated more freely in London. Exhibitions of ‘Indian jugglers’ and other exoticized spectacles, staged in venues near the Strand, sharpened Hazlitt’s reflections on skill, perception, and the ethics of viewing. At the same time, improved turnpike roads and mail-coach travel promoted domestic tourism praised in ‘On Going a Journey,’ while essays on distant objects and the picturesque weigh Burkean notions of the sublime against everyday experience. Distance—geographical and imaginative—emerges as a condition for pleasure and judgment.

Underlying the collection is a psychology shaped by British empiricism and associationism—Hume, Hartley, and Hazlitt’s own Essay on the Principles of Human Action (1805). This framework informs meditations on time in ‘On the Past and Future,’ decision and habit in ‘On Thought and Action,’ and mortality in ‘On the Fear of Death.’ The blend of analytic rigor and personal voice—indebted to Montaigne and eighteenth-century essayists—met a polarized reception: radical readers applauded its frankness, while Tory critics decried its irreverence. Yet Table Talk consolidated Hazlitt’s standing among Romantic-era prose writers, shaping later Victorian essayists’ engagement with culture, criticism, and the ethics of attention.

Synopsis (Selection)

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Art and Aesthetics: On the Pleasure of Painting; The Same Subject Continued; On a Landscape of Nicolas Poussin; Why Distant Objects Please; On the Picturesque and Ideal (A Fragment)

Hazlitt celebrates the sensuous, hands-on pleasures of making and looking at art, using painting practice, a Poussin landscape, and the lure of distance to show how perception, memory, and imagination refine experience.

In a rhapsodic yet analytic voice, he weighs the picturesque and the ideal, turning close observation into general aesthetic claims—a signature blend of painterly imagery, personal anecdote, and argument.

Art Theory and Reynolds: On Certain Inconsistencies in Sir Joshua Reynolds's Discourses; The Same Subject Continued

These paired essays interrogate Reynolds’s prescriptions, exposing tensions between doctrinal generalities and the stubborn particularity of artistic truth.

Combative and exacting, Hazlitt defends independence of vision and shows how authority can flatten style—an emblem of his broader skepticism toward systems.

Literary Craft and the Republic of Letters: On Criticism; On Familiar Style; On Paradox and

Common-Place; On Vulgarity and Affectation; On the Aristocracy of Letters; On Patronage and Puffing

Ranging from the aims of criticism and the virtues of familiar style to the uses of paradox and the corruptions of puffery and patronage, Hazlitt sets out a demanding yet democratic code for writing and judging prose.

Brisk, aphoristic, and anti-pretentious, these essays pit sincerity and live speech against cant, hierarchy, and fashionable affectation, charting the pressures of the literary marketplace.

Psychology and Intellectual Temperament: On Genius and Common Sense; The Same Subject Continued; On People with One Idea; On the Ignorance of the Learned; On Effeminacy of Character; On the Disadvantages of Intellectual Superiority; On the Knowledge of Character; On Thought and Action

Portraits of mind and temperament contrast genius with common sense, monomania with breadth, and learned pedantry with practical understanding, tracing how intellect succeeds or misfires in life.

Observational and psychologically acute, Hazlitt tests ideas against conduct, insisting that thought has value only when it animates action—one of his recurring ethical motifs.

Life, Time, and Mortality: On the Past and Future; On Living to One's-self; On Will-Making;

On Going a Journey; On Great and Little Things; On the Fear of Death

Meditations on time, solitude, travel, everyday scale, testamentary ritual, and mortality explore how the self negotiates expectation and memory within ordinary days.

Intimate and stoic-lyrical, the pieces balance private independence with humane candor, moving from restorative wandering to memento mori without losing conversational ease.

Society, Institutions, and Public Life: Character of Cobbett; On Coffee-House Politicians; On Corporate Bodies

By sketching a forceful public character, the talk of political cafés, and the groupthink of institutions, Hazlitt depicts the theater of opinion and power in everyday arenas.

Satiric yet concrete, he prizes individual judgment over party spirit and anatomizes how collective bodies mute conscience and clarity—a civic counterpart to his aesthetic independence.

Performance and Spectatorship: The Indian Jugglers; Whether Actors Ought to Sit in the Boxes?

From the astonishing dexterity of jugglers to the etiquette of who sits where in a theater, these essays probe the craft of performance and the social codes of spectatorship.

Lively and anecdotal with critical bite, they reveal Hazlitt’s fascination with practiced skill, stage illusion, and class signals embedded in taste and space.

On Milton's Sonnets

Hazlitt reads Milton’s sonnets as compressed moral, political, and personal utterances, arguing for their durable power beyond fashion.

Respectful and incisive, the essay foregrounds plain force, cadence, and integrity of voice—hallmarks of Hazlitt’s admiration for sincerity over ornament.

Table Talk

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VOLUME I

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ESSAY I. ON THE PLEASURE OF PAINTING

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'There is a pleasure in painting which none but painters know**[1q]**.' In writing, you have to contend with the world; in painting, you have only to carry on a friendly strife with Nature. You sit down to your task, and are happy. From the moment that you take up the pencil, and look Nature in the face, you are at peace with your own heart. No angry passions rise to disturb the silent progress of the work, to shake the hand, or dim the brow: no irritable humours are set afloat: you have no absurd opinions to combat, no point to strain, no adversary to crush, no fool to annoy—you are actuated by fear or favour to no man. There is 'no juggling here,' no sophistry, no intrigue, no tampering with the evidence, no attempt to make black white, or white black: but you resign yourself into the hands of a greater power, that of Nature, with the simplicity of a child, and the devotion of an enthusiast—'study with joy her manner, and with rapture taste her style.' The mind is calm, and full at the same time. The hand and eye are equally employed. In

tracing the commonest object, a plant or the stump of a tree, you learn something every moment. You perceive unexpected differences, and discover likenesses where you looked for no such thing. You try to set down what you see—find out your error, and correct it. You need not play tricks, or purposely mistake: with all your pains, you are still far short of the mark. Patience grows out of the endless pursuit, and turns it into a luxury. A streak in a flower, a wrinkle in a leaf, a tinge in a cloud, a stain in an old wall or ruin grey, are seized with avidity as the *spolia opima* of this sort of mental warfare, and furnish out labour for another half-day. The hours pass away untold, without chagrin, and without weariness; nor would you ever wish to pass them otherwise. Innocence is joined with industry, pleasure with business; and the mind is satisfied, though it is not engaged in thinking or in doing any mischief.(1)

I have not much pleasure in writing these *Essays*, or in reading them afterwards; though I own I now and then meet with a phrase that I like, or a thought that strikes me as a true one. But after I begin them, I am only anxious to get to the end of them, which I am not sure I shall do, for I seldom see my way a page or even a sentence beforehand; and when I have as by a miracle escaped, I trouble myself little more about them. I sometimes have to write them twice over: then it is necessary to read the *proof*, to prevent mistakes by the printer; so that by the time they appear in a tangible shape, and one can con them over with a conscious, sidelong glance to the public approbation, they have lost their gloss and relish, and become 'more tedious than a twice-told tale.' For a person to read his own works

over with any great delight, he ought first to forget that he ever wrote them. Familiarity naturally breeds contempt. It is, in fact, like poring fondly over a piece of blank paper; from repetition, the words convey no distinct meaning to the mind—are mere idle sounds, except that our vanity claims an interest and property in them. I have more satisfaction in my own thoughts than in dictating them to others: words are necessary to explain the impression of certain things upon me to the reader, but they rather weaken and draw a veil over than strengthen it to myself. However I might say with the poet, 'My mind to me a kingdom is,' yet I have little ambition 'to set a throne or chair of state in the understandings of other men.' The ideas we cherish most exist best in a kind of shadowy abstraction,

Pure in the last recesses of the mind,

and derive neither force nor interest from being exposed to public view. They are old familiar acquaintance, and any change in them, arising from the adventitious ornaments of style or dress, is little to their advantage. After I have once written on a subject, it goes out of my mind: my feelings about it have been melted down into words, and *then* I forget. I have, as it were, discharged my memory of its old habitual reckoning, and rubbed out the score of real sentiment. For the future it exists only for the sake of others. But I cannot say, from my own experience, that the same process takes place in transferring our ideas to canvas; they gain more than they lose in the mechanical transformation. One is never tired of painting, because you have to set down not what you knew already, but what you have just discovered. In the former case you translate feelings into words; in the latter, names into things. There is

a continual creation out of nothing going on. With every stroke of the brush a new field of inquiry is laid open; new difficulties arise, and new triumphs are prepared over them. By comparing the imitation with the original, you see what you have done, and how much you have still to do. The test of the senses is severer than that of fancy, and an over-match even for the delusions of our self-love. One part of a picture shames another, and you determine to paint up to yourself, if you cannot come up to Nature. Every object becomes lustrous from the light thrown back upon it by the mirror of art: and by the aid of the pencil we may be said to touch and handle the objects of sight. The air-drawn visions that hover on the verge of existence have a bodily presence given them on the canvas: the form of beauty is changed into a substance: the dream and the glory of the universe is made 'palpable to feeling as well as sight.'—And see! a rainbow starts from the canvas, with its humid train of glory, as if it were drawn from its cloudy arch in heaven. The spangled landscape glitters with drops of dew after the shower. The 'fleecy fools' show their coats in the gleams of the setting sun. The shepherds pipe their farewell notes in the fresh evening air. And is this bright vision made from a dead, dull blank, like a bubble reflecting the mighty fabric of the universe? Who would think this miracle of Rubens' pencil possible to be performed? Who, having seen it, would not spend his life to do the like? See how the rich fallows, the bare stubble-field, the scanty harvest-home, drag in Rembrandt's landscapes! How often have I looked at them and nature, and tried to do the same, till the very 'light thickened,' and there was an earthiness in the feeling of the

air! There is no end of the refinements of art and nature in this respect. One may look at the misty glimmering horizon till the eye dazzles and the imagination is lost, in hopes to transfer the whole interminable expanse at one blow upon the canvas. Wilson said, he used to try to paint the effect of the motes dancing in the setting sun. At another time, a friend, coming into his painting-room when he was sitting on the ground in a melancholy posture, observed that his picture looked like a landscape after a shower: he started up with the greatest delight, and said, 'That is the effect I intended to produce, but thought I had failed.' Wilson was neglected; and, by degrees, neglected his art to apply himself to brandy. His hand became unsteady, so that it was only by repeated attempts that he could reach the place or produce the effect he aimed at; and when he had done a little to a picture, he would say to any acquaintance who chanced to drop in, 'I have painted enough for one day: come, let us go somewhere.' It was not so Claude left his pictures, or his studies on the banks of the Tiber, to go in search of other enjoyments, or ceased to gaze upon the glittering sunny vales and distant hills; and while his eye drank in the clear sparkling hues and lovely forms of nature, his hand stamped them on the lucid canvas to last there for ever! One of the most delightful parts of my life was one fine summer, when I used to walk out of an evening to catch the last light of the sun, gemming the green slopes or russet lawns, and gilding tower or tree, while the blue sky, gradually turning to purple and gold, or skirted with dusky grey, hung its broad marble pavement over all, as we see it

in the great master of Italian landscape. But to come to a more particular explanation of the subject:—

The first head I ever tried to paint was an old woman with the upper part of the face shaded by her bonnet, and I certainly laboured (at) it with great perseverance. It took me numberless sittings to do it. I have it by me still, and sometimes look at it with surprise, to think how much pains were thrown away to little purpose,—yet not altogether in vain if it taught me to see good in everything, and to know that there is nothing vulgar in Nature seen with the eye of science or of true art. Refinement creates beauty everywhere: it is the grossness of the spectator that discovers nothing but grossness in the object. Be this as it may, I spared no pains to do my best. If art was long, I thought that life was so too at that moment. I got in the general effect the first day; and pleased and surprised enough I was at my success. The rest was a work of time—of weeks and months (if need were), of patient toil and careful finishing. I had seen an old head by Rembrandt at Burleigh House, and if I could produce a head at all like Rembrandt in a year, in my lifetime, it would be glory and felicity and wealth and fame enough for me! The head I had seen at Burleigh was an exact and wonderful facsimile of nature, and I resolved to make mine (as nearly as I could) an exact facsimile of nature. I did not then, nor do I now believe, with Sir Joshua, that the perfection of art consists in giving general appearances without individual details, but in giving general appearances with individual details. Otherwise, I had done my work the first day. But I saw something more in nature than general effect, and I thought

it worth my while to give it in the picture. There was a gorgeous effect of light and shade; but there was a delicacy as well as depth in the chiaroscuro which I was bound to follow into its dim and scarce perceptible variety of tone and shadow. Then I had to make the transition from a strong light to as dark a shade, preserving the masses, but gradually softening off the intermediate parts. It was so in nature; the difficulty was to make it so in the copy. I tried, and failed again and again; I strove harder, and succeeded as I thought. The wrinkles in Rembrandt were not hard lines, but broken and irregular. I saw the same appearance in nature, and strained every nerve to give it. If I could hit off this edgy appearance, and insert the reflected light in the furrows of old age in half a morning, I did not think I had lost a day. Beneath the shrivelled yellow parchment look of the skin, there was here and there a streak of the blood-colour tinging the face; this I made a point of conveying, and did not cease to compare what I saw with what I did (with jealous, lynx-eyed watchfulness) till I succeeded to the best of my ability and judgment. How many revisions were there! How many attempts to catch an expression which I had seen the day before! How often did we try to get the old position, and wait for the return of the same light! There was a puckering up of the lips, a cautious introversion of the eye under the shadow of the bonnet, indicative of the feebleness and suspicion of old age, which at last we managed, after many trials and some quarrels, to a tolerable nicety. The picture was never finished, and I might have gone on with it to the present hour.(2) I used to sit it on the ground when my day's work was done, and saw

revealed to me with swimming eyes the birth of new hopes and of a new world of objects. The painter thus learns to look at Nature with different eyes. He before saw her 'as in a glass darkly, but now face to face.' He understands the texture and meaning of the visible universe, and 'sees into the life of things,' not by the help of mechanical instruments, but of the improved exercise of his faculties, and an intimate sympathy with Nature. The meanest thing is not lost upon him, for he looks at it with an eye to itself, not merely to his own vanity or interest, or the opinion of the world. Even where there is neither beauty nor use—if that ever were—still there is truth, and a sufficient source of gratification in the indulgence of curiosity and activity of mind. The humblest printer is a true scholar; and the best of scholars—the scholar of Nature. For myself, and for the real comfort and satisfaction of the thing, I had rather have been Jan Steen, or Gerard Dow, than the greatest casuist or philologer that ever lived. The painter does not view things in clouds or 'mist, the common gloss of theologians,' but applies the same standard of truth and disinterested spirit of inquiry, that influence his daily practice, to other subjects. He perceives form, he distinguishes character. He reads men and books with an intuitive eye. He is a critic as well as a connoisseur. The conclusions he draws are clear and convincing, because they are taken from the things themselves. He is not a fanatic, a dupe, or a slave; for the habit of seeing for himself also disposes him to judge for himself. The most sensible men I know (taken as a class) are painters; that is, they are the most lively observers of what passes in the world about them, and the closest observers

of what passes in their own minds. From their profession they in general mix more with the world than authors; and if they have not the same fund of acquired knowledge, are obliged to rely more on individual sagacity. I might mention the names of Opie, Fuseli, Northcote, as persons distinguished for striking description and acquaintance with the subtle traits of character.(3) Painters in ordinary society, or in obscure situations where their value is not known, and they are treated with neglect and indifference, have sometimes a forward self-sufficiency of manner; but this is not so much their fault as that of others. Perhaps their want of regular education may also be in fault in such cases. Richardson, who is very tenacious of the respect in which the profession ought to be held, tells a story of Michael Angelo, that after a quarrel between him and Pope Julius II., 'upon account of a slight the artist conceived the pontiff had put upon him, Michael Angelo was introduced by a bishop, who, thinking to serve the artist by it, made it an argument that the Pope should be reconciled to him, because men of his profession were commonly ignorant, and of no consequence otherwise; his holiness, enraged at the bishop, struck him with his staff, and told him, it was he that was the blockhead, and affronted the man himself would not offend: the prelate was driven out of the chamber, and Michael Angelo had the Pope's benediction, accompanied with presents. This bishop had fallen into the vulgar error, and was rebuked accordingly.'

Besides the exercise of the mind, painting exercises the body. It is a mechanical as well as a liberal art. To do anything, to dig a hole in the ground, to plant a cabbage, to

On Familiar Style articulates a preference for supple, idiomatic prose that carries thought without ostentation. This ethic meets its pressure points in On Paradox and Common-Place, where he embraces provocation only when it advances understanding, and in On Vulgarity and Affectation, which rebukes both coarse display and refined pretense. Across them, Hazlitt seeks a register that can test assumptions without courting novelty for its own sake. The style he prizes keeps company with lived experience, neither pandering to fashion nor retreating into scholastic stiffness, and thereby preserves a nimble, democratic authority.

In On Genius and Common Sense and its continuation, Hazlitt draws a shifting border between exceptional insight and practical judgment, resisting easy hierarchy. On People with One Idea dramatizes the danger of narrowness masquerading as rigor, while On Great and Little Things reveals how scale is contingent on mood and context. His prose stages these discriminations through antithesis, amplification, and sudden turns, letting syntax enact the very balances it recommends. Reason becomes kinetic rather than static, achieved moment by moment through adjustments that keep extremes in view without surrendering to them.

On Criticism and On Effeminacy of Character illustrate his willingness to provoke while negotiating period vocabularies and moral tones. The former argues for accountable judgment; the latter interrogates softness as a temperamental drift, not a fixed identity, allowing social observation to remain elastic. The Character of Cobbett

extends this tact by portraying energy and contradiction without flattening into caricature. Hazlitt’s voice sustains authority by calibrating sympathy and censure, holding an audience through clarity, speed, and pointed example, while preserving room for ambivalence. The result is a style that makes thinking appear audible and shared.

Question 4

In what ways do time, motion, and mortality contour agency and self-knowledge for Hazlitt?

On the Past and Future frames time as a field of expectation and recollection that can eclipse the present, while On Going a Journey recovers presentness through solitary movement and sensory immersion. The journey essay favors a paced awareness that frees thought from social drag, letting contingency reorient habit. Read together, they propose that motion disciplines imagination, tempering the tyranny of projected hopes and retrospective edits. Travel’s measured rhythm becomes a means of recalibrating attention so that memory and anticipation serve experience rather than displacing it.

On Thought and Action probes the friction between intention and deed, observing how reflection can either prime initiative or anesthetize it. On Great and Little Things adds that magnitude depends on temperament and occasion, and The Indian Jugglers dramatizes skilled performance as concentration embodied in time. Hazlitt values poise that converts mental energy into controlled sequence, where difficulty is neither romanticized nor denied. This triad suggests agency as a choreographed

temporality: actions succeed when attention holds steady across increments, and they falter when thought swells beyond the cadence that execution can bear.

On the Fear of Death confronts finitude without recourse to consolatory systems, balancing dread with the attachments that give limits their human scale. On Will-Making places mortality into legal ceremony, where feelings are forced into durable instructions that acknowledge posterity’s claims. These pieces echo Why Distant Objects Please, since distance—temporal rather than spatial—can soften edges and render endings thinkable without falsifying them. Hazlitt’s reflections treat mortality as a frame that sharpens value, urging an economy of attention in which the present is strengthened, not diminished, by clear sight of its bounds.

Memorable Quotes

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1q "'There is a pleasure in painting which none but painters know."

2q "I have naturally but little imagination, and am not of a very sanguine turn of mind."

3q "The heart alone, when touched by sympathy, trembles and responds to their hidden meaning!"

4q "He is not wedded to his notions, not he."

5q "Man, thou art a wonderful animal"

6q "But however beautiful the description, defend me from meeting with the original!"

7q "The fly that sips treacle Is lost in the sweets; So he that tastes woman Ruin meets."

8q "Nature is and must be the fountain which alone is inexhaustible, and from which all excellences must originally flow."

9q "You must have no dependence on your own genius."

10q "Originality implies independence of opinion"