

## **BYRON AND HAZLITT: A NEW LOOK AT *THE LIBERAL***

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I wish to thank Christine Kenyon-Jones and Roddy Beaton for inviting me to deliver this plenary lecture--and, as an aside, to note that I vividly remember my first Byron Conference 37 years ago, in 1976, in Messolonghi, Greece--where I met some of the distinguished scholars of the International Byron Society, a 27-year-old John Knebworth, and the work-horses of the society: Ian Scott-Kilvert and especially the beloved Michael Rees--and, of course, Elma Dangerfield.

I have also run two of these international conferences in the United States (in 1979; and again, with Jack Wasserman, in 2001); and I also remember speaking on "Byron and the 4th of July" on the 4th of July 2000 at the Carlton Club in London, when and where I had the distinction of being harrumphed many times by Michael Foot, who takes me to my subject of Byron and Hazlitt, for Michael was both a Byron and a Hazlitt scholar. A quotation from Michael's important book, *The Politics of Paradise*, aptly reflects the subject of this conference: for Hazlitt, he observed, "the paths of politics and literature crossed and re-crossed in an endless interweaving: each could lead to fulfilment in the other, and each without sustenance from the other could prove bitter and abortive."<sup>1</sup> The same for Byron as for Hazlitt: politics and literature--poetry and politics--we are reminded of Shelley's famous remark that "Poets are the unacknowledged

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<sup>1</sup> Michael Foot, *The Politics of Paradise: A Vindication of Byron* (London: Collins, 1988), pp. 13-14. For an equally important commentary on Byron and Hazlitt, see Duncan Wu's 2002 Byron Foundation Lecture, "Talking Pimples: Hazlitt and Byron in Love" <<http://byron.nottingham.ac.uk/resources/digital/foundation%20lectures/Wu.pdf>>.

legislators of the World.” And for Michael Foot (and his nephew Paul Foot), that world should be socialist or, at least, liberal.

And *The Liberal* will provide the epicenter of my talk, for it is that by which I can best relate Byron and Hazlitt. We often forget that Hazlitt made six contributions to that famous and short-lived, 4-part journal (1822-1823), which rose from the ashes after Shelley’s death. Five of Hazlitt’s contributions were published therein,<sup>2</sup> making him, after Leigh Hunt and Byron, the third most frequent contributor to that journal--even though he was not brought into the enterprise until the second number, in which he published his essays on “On the Spirit of Monarchy” and “On the Scotch Character (A Fragment).”

We also forget or perhaps never really consider the fact that Byron and Hazlitt never met, a “sad” state of affairs according to Michael Foot. Of course, they did have friends in common and indirectly engaged each other through their works. One friend early on was Leigh Hunt--both Byron and Hazlitt visited him in prison in 1813. Another friend (or acquaintance) in common was Shelley, whom Hazlitt met at Leigh Hunt’s in early 1817: Hazlitt and Shelley must have sensed in each other their common interests (especially their unorthodox politics and their skepticism), and during one visit, according to Mary Shelley, Percy Shelley and Hazlitt discussed “monarchy & republicanism” till 3 in the morning.<sup>3</sup> Although Shelley in 1821 indicated that he did not know much about Hazlitt, in 1819 he stated in his *Philosophical View of Reform* that a

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<sup>2</sup> The one Hazlitt contribution not published was a set of “Maxims”--see William H. Marshall, *Byron, Shelley, Hunt, and The Liberal* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1960), pp. 174-175--hereafter cited as Marshall.

<sup>3</sup> *The Journals of Mary Shelley, 1814-1844*, ed. Paula R. Feldman and Diana Scott-Kilvert (Oxford: At the Clarendon Press, 1987), I: 163.

select group of “poets and philosophers and artists,” including Hazlitt, should petition the House of Commons for their liberties and thereby start to reform English politics and society. Of note here is that Shelley originally wrote in his manuscript that the select group included “Godwin & Hazlitt & Lord Byron,” only to cross out Byron and edit in instead the names of “Bentham & Hunt” as defenders of liberty.<sup>4</sup> Shelley, despite being the son of a baronet, may have recognized, as Hazlitt (and others) would to a much greater degree, that Byron’s position as a peer of the realm excluded him from the more radical Shelleyan proposals.

The Hazlitt-Shelley relationship provides a template for the Hazlitt-Byron relationship. Despite their considerably different social standings, had Byron and Hazlitt actually met, I am certain they also would have talked through an evening, finding (despite their differences) their common ground: both were liberal in politics; both embraced and admired Napoleon in ways that alienated many of their contemporaries; both were unorthodox in religion, Hazlitt being an ex-Unitarian and Byron an ex-Calvinist; both were unafraid of adopting the confessional mode of discussing their marital and sexual matters (a future conference might compare the raciness of Byron’s *Don Juan* and Hazlitt’s *Liber Amoris*, both, by the way, published by John Hunt). Anyone who pursues the *Liber Amoris* and *Don Juan* connections might want to pause over Hazlitt’s observation in his “On Patronage and Puffing”: “There are some, indeed,

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<sup>4</sup> *Shelley and His Circle, 1773-1822*, ed. Donald H. Reiman {Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1973}, 6: 1060.

who publish their own disgrace, and make their names a common by-word and nuisance, notoriety being all that they want.”<sup>5</sup>

At the very least, we can argue that both writers adopted a personal style of writing that we now recognize as the Byronic and the Hazlittian voices. To appropriate Wordsworth’s Preface to the *Lyrical Ballads* here, both Byron and Hazlitt were men “speaking to men: [men] endowed with more lively sensibility..., who ha[d] a greater knowledge of human nature, and...more comprehensive soul[s], than are supposed to be common among mankind; [men] pleased with [their] own passions and volitions.” Even Hazlitt acknowledged their similarities when he wrote in *The London Weekly Review* on 17 May 1828: “did it never strike you that Lord Byron himself was a *cockney-writer*, if descending from the conventional to the vernacular is to be so.”<sup>6</sup> Byron might have objected to such an association, but the *John Bull Magazine* also accused Byron of writing “bad grammar and cockney English” in *The Vision of Judgment*.<sup>7</sup> Perhaps some future Byron conference might compare the diction and syntax and rhythms of Byron’s poetry and Hazlitt’s prose.

There is not time to rehearse the major interrelations of Byron and Hazlitt before turning to our main subject of Hazlitt joining Byron and Hunt in writing for *The Liberal* (a joining arranged by Leigh Hunt’s brother John back in London), but the following points are worth mentioning:

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<sup>5</sup> *The Complete Works of William Hazlitt*, 21 vols., ed. by P. P. Howe (London: J. M. Dent and Sons Ltd, 1930-1934), 8: 291--hereafter cited as Howe.

<sup>6</sup> Howe, 20: 159.

<sup>7</sup> See James Hogg, “Contemporary Reception of ‘The Liberal,’” *The Byron Journal* 7 (1979): 67--with reference to *John Bull Magazine*, 98, 27 October 1822, pp. 780-781.

1] As Nancy M. Goslee argued in a 1982 article on Byron's "Prometheus," Byron apparently read and was influenced by Hazlitt's unsigned review of Schlegel's *Lectures on Dramatic Art and Literature* published in the *Edinburgh Review* for February 1816.<sup>8</sup>

2] Byron was discussed in Hazlitt's 8th lecture on the English poets at the Surrey Institution in early March 1818--a lecture reprised in mid-April at the Crown and Anchor Tavern--and then published in May 1818. Byron possessed a copy of these published *Lectures on the English Poets*<sup>9</sup> and read therein (and/or elsewhere) Hazlitt repeating commonplaces about Byron's poetry--that he "shuts himself up too much in the impenetrable gloom of his own thoughts"; and that the "Giaour, the Corsair, Childe Harold are all the same person, and they are apparently all himself." Despite these and other complaints, Byron's works were praised for having "great unity and truth of keeping" together with "vigour of style and force of conception." Had Hazlitt stopped at that point, Byron would probably not have noticed the remarks--but Hazlitt then complained about Byron's writings on Buonaparte: "Not that I quarrel with his writing for him, or against him, but with his writing both for and against him" (Howe, 5: 152-154).

3] By February 1819, Byron defended his judgments on and representations of Napoleon in a long note that he wanted to append to the first canto of *Don Juan* (or at an appropriate place in the forthcoming edition of *Mazeppa*); but, after Hobhouse and

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<sup>8</sup> See Goslee's "Pure Stream from a Troubled Source: Byron, Schlegel and Prometheus," *The Byron Journal*, 10 (1982): 20-36.

<sup>9</sup> See item 99 in the 1827 Sale Catalogue of Byron's Works as printed in *Lord Byron: The Complete Miscellaneous Prose*, ed. Andrew Nicholson (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991), p. 49.

Murray judged that such a response was beneath the Lord, the note was not published at that time.<sup>10</sup>

4] In June 1821, Hazlitt in the *London Magazine* reviewed Byron's *Letter to John Murray* on the Bowles-Pope controversy as "*pribble-prabble*" and "trash," judging that Byron's rank as a "Noble Poet" gave him more attention than he otherwise deserved and suggesting that Byron should not write prose. However, Hazlitt singled out a famous passage in which Byron argued that the "the grand *primum mobile* of England is *cant*: cant political, cant poetical, cant religious, cant moral; but always cant, multiplied through all the varieties of life.... I say *cant*, because it is a thing of words, without the smallest influence upon human actions." "These words," Hazlitt added, "should be written in letters of gold, as the testimony of a lofty poet to a great moral truth, and we can hardly have a quarrel with the writer of them" (Howe, 19: 62, 70, 64).

5] But, of course, Hazlitt (because of his querulous nature) published in June 1822 a *Table-Talk* essay "On the Aristocracy of Letters," in which he once again noted, somewhat enviously, how the privilege of being a peer helped Byron in the literary marketplace: "He towers above his fellows by all the height of the peerage" (Howe, 8: 209)--and again complained about the quality of Byron's *Letter to John Murray*. Two months later, in August 1822, Hazlitt in his "On the Prose-Style of Poets" bluntly wrote that "Lord Byron's prose is bad; that is to say, heavy, laboured, and coarse" (Howe, 12: 17).

However, Byron's great poetry would shortly thereafter trump his bad prose, for on 15 October 1822 his *Vision of Judgment* would appear in the first number of *The*

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<sup>10</sup> See *Lord Byron: The Complete Poetical Works*, ed. Jerome J. McGann, Volume V: *Don Juan* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986), pp. 682-683.

*Liberal*. Within two weeks, various newspapers and reviews had condemned the purpose and content and writers of this new journal. William Jerdan's *Literary Gazette* was especially negative, but it is significant that in his second of three articles on *The Liberal*, on 26 October 1822, after remarking that this "vulgar production" "is almost dead already," Jerdan (or his reviewer) added that "it is supposed that Lord Byron, if he continues to try the speculation, must export to Pisa, Hazlitt, the manager of Sir Richard Phillips' Magazine, or some other genteel and able person competent to throw a little spirit into the future Numbers, and prevent their being so inhumanly disgraced by Lordly spleen and sycophantic...prostitution."<sup>11</sup> We cannot be certain how Jerdan knew (or suspected) that Hazlitt would be involved, but on that same day of 26 October 1822 Leigh Hunt wrote from Italy to his brother John in London and asked "Is Hazlitt preparing anything yet?" and added that "Lord B. admires Hazlitt's writings."<sup>12</sup>

Hazlitt himself sheds a little (but not much) light on his being invited to write for *The Liberal*. According to his 1825 *Plain Speaker* essay "On the Jealousy and the Spleen of Party," he recalled both the invitation and the effect of his first essay, "On the Spirit of Monarchy"--all of this after Byron had published his own satire on the monarchy in *The Vision of Judgment* and been vilified by Tory and Whig alike for aligning himself with Leigh Hunt and Shelley. As Hazlitt recalled it, "Blackwood's Magazine overflowed...with tenfold gall and bitterness; the John Bull was outrageous; and Mr. Jerdan black in the face at this unheard-of and disgraceful union," especially between Byron and Hunt. Even Thomas Moore and Hobhouse were "thrown into almost

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<sup>11</sup> 26 October 1822, p. 678.

<sup>12</sup> See Luther A. Brewer, *My Leigh Hunt Library: The Holograph Letters* (Iowa City: University of Iowa, 1938), p. 155.

hysterical agonies of well-bred horror at the coalition between their noble and ignoble acquaintance, between the Patrician and ‘the Newspaper-Man [that is, Hunt].’” Hazlitt’s contributions to *The Liberal* only made matters worse: “I was invited to take part in this obnoxious publication (obnoxious alike to friend and foe)--and,” Hazlitt continued, “when the *Essay on the Spirit of Monarchy* appeared, (which must indeed have operated like a bomb-shell thrown into the *coteries* that Mr. Moore frequented, as well as those that he had left,) this gentleman wrote off to Lord Byron, to say that ‘there was a taint in the Liberal, and that he should lose no time in getting out of it.’” Hazlitt then added, showing that he linked his own essay on “Monarchy” with Byron’s *Vision* by way of this “taint”: “And this from Mr. Moore to Lord Byron--the last of whom had just involved the publication, against which he was cautioned as having a taint in it, in a prosecution for libel by his *Vision of Judgment*, and the first of whom had scarcely written any thing all his life that had not a taint in it” (Howe, 12: 378-379). By the bye, a radical publisher in the 1830s advertised Byron’s *Vision of Judgment* (for thruppence) together with Hazlitt’s “Spirit of Monarchy” (bound with Godwin’s “The Moral Effects of Aristocracy”) (for tuppence), suggesting that at least one set of readers associated Byron and Hazlitt as radical, anti-monarchical writers.<sup>13</sup>

That Byron in 1822, according to Hunt, admired Hazlitt’s writings is hearsay evidence, but Byron was at least tacitly involved in inviting Hazlitt to write for *The Liberal* by October of that year. And Hazlitt returned the admiration, at least implicitly, by way of that first essay, “On the Spirit of Monarchy,” published in the second number of *The Liberal* on 1 January 1823, which essay indirectly invokes the spirit of Byron’s

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<sup>13</sup> An advertisement for “Useful and Popular Works sold by Wakelin, 1, Shoe-Lane, Fleet-street, for John Cleave” in *The London Dispatch and People’s Political and Social Reformer*, 16 October 1836.

*Vision of Judgment*. Although Hazlitt did not employ the supernatural machinery as Byron had done in his poem, he went to Byronic extremes in taking monarchs and kingship to task. Hazlitt, like Byron, condemned the “mock-sublimity of thrones” and argued that “Tyranny [in a king] is a farce got up for the entertainment of poor human nature” and that the one to inherit a crown “may be little better than an idiot, little short of a madman”--one who, without having been a member of the royal family, “would never have risen by natural abilities to the situation of churchwarden or parish beadle” (Howe, 19: 256, 260 and n.). Hazlitt, of course, had to be careful not to cause another indictment by the Constitutional Association that led to the trial against John Hunt for publishing Byron’s *Vision*, which, according to the December 1822 indictment did “injure, defame, disgrace, and vilify, the memory, reputation, and character of his late Majesty King George the Third, the Father of our Sovereign Lord the now King, and of divers others the descendants of his said late Majesty, members of the Royal Family of this realm.”<sup>14</sup> Hazlitt apparently had the foresight to avoid such a response to his essay, noting therein with some degree of irony the difference between an unlimited and a limited or constitutional monarchy: “Phaw! we had forgot--Our British monarchy is a mixed, and the only perfect form of government; and therefore what is here said cannot properly apply to it” (19:261). And, again: “A constitutional king, on the other hand, is a servant of the public, a representative of the people’s wants and wishes, dispensing justice and mercy according to law. Such a monarch is the King of England! Such was his late, and such is his present Majesty George the IVth!--” (19: 263). Hazlitt appears to have been protecting himself and John Hunt from another libel suit.

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<sup>14</sup> As quoted by Marshall, pp. 126-127.

We do not know if Byron actually read Hazlitt's "On the Spirit of Monarchy," but the available documents indicate that Byron had the courage to continue his association with the cockneys, both Hunt and Hazlitt, in *The Liberal*, despite the pressure on him from his London friends and from the London reviewers. I say this despite Leigh Hunt's recollection of this time in his 1828 *Lord Byron and Some of his Contemporaries*, in which he noted that "Lord Byron in truth was afraid of Mr. Hazlitt; he admitted him like a courtier, for fear he should be treated by him as an enemy; but when he beheld such articles as the 'Spirit of Monarchy,' where the 'taint' of polite corruption [note Hunt repeating Thomas Moore's word of 'taint'] was to be exposed, and the First Acquaintance of Poets [Hazlitt's famous essay in *The Liberal*], where Mr. Wordsworth was to be exalted above depreciation,... his Lordship could only wish him out again [Hunt again repeating Moore's word of 'out'], and take pains to show his polite friends that he had nothing in common with so inconsiderate a plebeian."<sup>15</sup>

That Byron wanted Hazlitt "out" of the enterprise is not impossible, but it is not supported by the other extant evidence: Byron nowhere remarks directly on Hazlitt's articles. All that Hunt said was the Byron "beheld" the Monarchy essay in the second number of *The Liberal*, in which Byron's *Heaven and Earth* also appeared; however Byron's beholding his own and Hazlitt's contributions was not until after 3 February, for that second number of *The Liberal* had been delayed in transit from London to Genoa.<sup>16</sup> Byron also apparently "beheld" Hazlitt's the "My First Acquaintance with Poets" essay,

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<sup>15</sup> Leigh Hunt, *Lord Byron and Some of His Contemporaries; with Recollections of the Author's Life, and of His Visit to Italy*, 2d ed. (London: Henry Colburn, 1828), I: 108-109.

<sup>16</sup> Hunt's letter to Joseph Severn of 3 February 1823 suggests that the copies of *The Liberal* sent by vessel to Genoa had not yet arrived--see "The Letters of Leigh Hunt in the Luther A. Brewer Collection: 1816-1825," ed. Hunter Pell McCartney, diss, University of Pennsylvania, 1958, p. 133.

which appeared cheek by jowl with Byron's *The Blues* in the third number of *The Liberal*.

None of the extant letters to and from Byron at this time (most made available online by the University of Iowa Library and also by the hard work of Peter Cochran and Paul Curtis) indicates that Byron was attempting to rid himself of Hazlitt--or even of Hunt, who benefited financially from Byron's association with *The Liberal*. Between 10 October 1822 and 24 February 1823, extant letters from Hunt and Byron indicate that Byron continued to support both Hunt and *The Liberal*.<sup>17</sup> Although on 27 February and 1 March Byron explained to Kinnaird that *The Liberal* "is highly injurious to me," wished

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<sup>17</sup> For example, on 10 October 1822 (5 days before the first issue of *The Liberal* was published), Leigh Hunt wrote to his brother John that "upon the whole [Byron] is well pleased [with the magazine]" (see below for citation); on 26 October 1822, Leigh Hunt explained to his brother that "Lord B. admires Hazlitt's writings, & both likes & admires Lamb"; on 14 November 1822, Leigh Hunt wrote to his nephew Henry Leigh Hunt that "The feelings with which the corrupt & hypocritical of all classes must view Lord Byron's connection with the Liberal, are obvious: and the best answer we can make, is to shew them that the connexion continues, & that the second number will have all the same reasons for putting them in a passion, as the first. This is quite as much Lord Byron's opinion as my own"; on 16 November 1822, Byron wrote to Mary Shelley that he "engaged in the Journal from good-will towards [Hunt], added to respect for his character, literary and personal; and no less for his political courage" (*Byron's Letters and Journals*, ed. Leslie A. Marchand, 11 vols. (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1973-1982), 10: 3--hereafter Marchand); on 14 December 1822, Byron acknowledged to Hobhouse: "I have gotten myself into a scrape with the very best intentions (--i.e. to do good to these Sunday paper patriots)," the plural suggesting the Hunts but perhaps also including Hazlitt (Marchand, 10: 57); on 23 December 1822, Byron wrote to Kinnaird that "For my *own* share of 'the Liberal' I have declined taking anything whatever for the present--and I have furnished them with 'the Pulci' and 'the new Mystery'" (Marchand, 10: 66), indicating that Byron (even though he at the time "proposed to [the Hunts] to give up the notion of the Journal") was still participating despite Hazlitt's forthcoming essays in the second number of *The Liberal* on 1 January 1823; on 30 December 1822, Byron told Kinnaird he would "fee Counsel" for John Hunt for the forthcoming libel trial for the publishing of Byron's *Vision of Judgment* (Marchand, 10: 78-79); on 18 January 1823, Byron "forwarded [to Kinnaird] a packet ... containing a letter [with] certain poeshies for any ensuing number of 'the Liberal'--to be transmitted by you to Mr. J. H. in time" (Marchand, 10: 87); on 24 February 1823, Byron remarked in a letter to Mary Shelley on the "continual declamation against the Liberal from all parties--literary--amicable--and political--I never heard so persevering an outcry against any work--nor do I know the reason for not even dullness or demerit could authorize the extraordinary tone of reprobation" (Marchand, 10: 108.). The Hunt letters quoted above are taken from the facsimile and transcription pages of the University of Iowa Digital Library of Leigh Hunt Letters <<http://digital.lib.uiowa.edu/leighhunt>>. The Byron letters may also be found on Peter Cochran's web site at <<http://petercochran.wordpress.com>>.

“to retire from it,” and would “have no more to do with the Liberal,”<sup>18</sup> by 3 March Byron recanted his retirement;<sup>19</sup> and on 10 March he generously wrote that “If there must be a sacrifice--I would rather risk myself than other people”--and continued to offer materials to *The Liberal*.<sup>20</sup> Byron indeed risked himself, for *Maga*’s March 1823 review of Hazlitt’s “On the Scotch Character” begins as follows: “Lord Byron being a somewhat whimsical nobleman, has lately hired two or three Cockneys as menial servants. They are to do his dirty work” and have “the manner of pimps and purveyors; and...occasionally enact high life below stairs, and waltz away with washer-women and bar-maids, and used-up kept-mistresses,”<sup>21</sup> phrasings that suggest that Hazlitt’s *Liber Amoris* affair was well known even before the book was published in May 1823.

Byron was certainly aware of the effect of Hazlitt’s contributions to *The Liberal*; and we know that he at least “beheld” Hazlitt’s “Monarchy” essay in the second number published on 1 January 1823 (and presumably his “On the Scotch Character” that appeared in the same number)--and that he “beheld” Hazlitt’s famous “My First

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<sup>18</sup> Marchand, 10: 110, 114. A fuller transcription of these two letters to Kinnaird suggests the complexity of Byron’s relations with Hunt and *The Liberal*: “I wish also that you would state to Mr. J H that as long as I thought ‘the Liberal’ could be of service to him and to his brother--I was happy to conduce to it--though I *opposed* it from the beginning--knowing how it would end--but that as it answers little to them--and is highly injurious to me in every way--I wish to retire from it.--They will carry it on as well without me.--For his next number he has a translation from Pulci of mine which he may have if he pleases” (10: 110); “I will have no more to do with the Liberal.--The Age of Bronze must be published alone.--The Liberal was a bad business--see what it is to do a *good* action? Had I not assisted Hunt after S[helley]’s demise he might have starved in the Streets--and my reward has been universal abuse.--Never mind--we may beat them all yet” (10: 114).

<sup>19</sup> “Hunt has been to beseech me *not* to quit the liberal at present--as it would wound him.--I wish to wound nobody--and will do what I can...he has a Pulci translation of mine for his next number” (Marchand, 10: 115).

<sup>20</sup> Marchand, 10: 121.

<sup>21</sup> “On the Scotch Character--By a Flunky,” *Blackwood’s Edinburgh Magazine*, 12 (March 1823): 365. In this same issue, “Candid” asked in his letter to Christopher North if it was true “that Lord Byron has added another Cockney to the number of accomplished scholars and friends who share his task?--Hazlitt!” (12: 265).

Acquaintance with Poets” essay published in the third number on 23 April 1823, which Byron probably read in May or June in Genoa, before he departed for Greece on 15 July. The fourth number of *The Liberal* was not published until 2 weeks later, on 30 July, and it is doubtful that Byron ever received and read that number, which contained “Arguing in a Circle,” what Carlos Baker linked to Byron’s *Vision of Judgment* by calling Hazlitt’s essay “a superb lament on political apostasy.”<sup>22</sup>

Hazlitt’s “Argument in a Circle” seems to characterize his own circuitous rhetoric in going from one point to another in this essay (without ever closing the circle). He began by commending the “public” who keep politicians honest, illustrating his point by reference to a public fracas between “a Lord and one or two Members of Parliament.” If, on the other hand, an affair or dispute “is private and can be kept in a corner,” then “personal fear and favour are the ruling principles, *might* prevails over *right*” (Howe, 19: 267). Hazlitt had used the same idea and a similar phrasing in his essay on “Monarchy” when he lamented that “[political] MIGHT BEFORE [PUBLIC] RIGHT is the motto blazoned on the front of unimpaired and undivided Sovereignty!” (Howe, 19: 261). In both instances, Hazlitt sided with the people in their inevitable conflict with the government-- and he would side with journalists today in exposing the corruption of the state. Hazlitt in “Argument in a Circle” then urged that any such fracas between “individuals, high in rank, and low in understanding and morals,” should be brought “before the world [where] truth and justice stand some chance. The public is too large a body,” he continued, “to be bribed or browbeat.” He then indicted the Duke of Buckingham who made a speech in the House of Lords “to prove that legitimate monarchs have a right, whenever they

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<sup>22</sup> Carlos Baker, *William Hazlitt* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1962), p. 423.

please, to run their swords through the heart of a nation and *pink* [pierce with a rapier] the liberties of mankind” (Howe, 19: 267-268). After acknowledging that England preserves individual liberties more than other countries, Hazlitt condemned England for opposing the libertarian movements in France. Then after remarking, circuitously, on the differences between friendships made early and late in life, Hazlitt segued from the Lake Poets to conclude on Robert Southey, whom he termed, as Byron had done, an “apostate” who was one of the “turn-coats” (Howe, 19: 277).

Hazlitt may not have come “full circle” in this essay in which he apparently wished to ingratiate himself with the Byron who had also assailed Southey as an apostate and turn-coat, but in 1824 he did return to his former judgments on the “liberal” and “Noble Poet” in his famous chapter on Byron that appeared in the 1825 *Spirit of the Age*, an essay that stops almost in mid sentence to report the death of Byron, acknowledges that the chapter to that point had been written as a “somewhat peevish invective,” and praises Lord Byron as “a martyr to his zeal in the cause of freedom” (Howe, 11: 77-78). Rather than quote more from that essay, with which most of you are familiar, I prefer to conclude this lecture with a less well-know passage, Hazlitt’s most eloquent praise of Byron, to be found in his review of Shelley’s *Posthumous Poems* in the July 1824

*Edinburgh Review*:

“To this band of immortals [Keats and Shelley] a third has since been added!--a mightier genius, a haughtier spirit, whose stubborn impatience and Achilles-like pride only Death could quell. Greece, Italy, the world, have lost their poet-hero; and his death has spread a wider gloom, and been recorded with a deeper awe, than has waited on the obsequies of any of the many great who have died in our remembrance. Even detraction

has been silent at his tomb; and the more generous of his enemies have fallen into the rank of his mourners. But he set like the sun in his glory; and his orb was greatest and brightest at the last; for his memory is now consecrated no less by freedom than genius. He probably fell a martyr to his zeal against tyrants. He attached himself to the cause of Greece, and dying, clung to it with a convulsive grasp, and has thus gained a niche in her history; for whatever *she* claims as hers is immortal, even in decay, as the marble sculptures on the columns of her fallen temples!” (Howe, 16: 269-270).

And we will visit those marble sculptures later today to pay homage to that “poet-hero” who was Byron--and listen to the words of both Byron and Hazlitt as they responded to the Elgin marbles.<sup>23</sup> It is sad that Byron and Hazlitt were never on the same stage together--and even sadder that Michael Foot could not have arranged such a historic meeting between the Cockney and the Peer!

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<sup>23</sup> On Tuesday, 2 July 2013, the participants from the 39<sup>th</sup> International Byron Conference visited the British Museum for a private reception and a reading before the Parthenon Sculptures.