The striking peculiarity of Shakespeare’s mind was its generic quality, its power of communication with all other minds—so that it contained a universe of thought and feeling within itself, and had no one peculiar bias, or exclusive excellence more than another. He was just like any other man, but that he was like all other men. He was the least of an egotist that it was possible to be. He was nothing in himself; but he was all that others were, or that they could become. He not only had in himself the germs of every faculty and feeling, but he could follow them by anticipation, intuitively, into all their conceivable ramifications, through every change of fortune or conflict of passion, or turn of thought. He had “a mind reflecting ages past,” and present—all the people that ever lived are there. There was no respect of persons with him. His genius shone equally on the evil and on the good, on the wise and the foolish, the monarch and the beggar: “All corners of the earth, kings, queens, and states, maids, matrons, nay, the secrets of the grave,” are hardly hid from his searching glance. He was like the genius of humanity, changing places with all of us at pleasure, and playing with our purposes as with his own. He turned the globe round for his amusement, and surveyed the generations of men, and the individuals as they passed, with their different concerns, passions, follies, vices, virtues, actions, and motives—as well those that they knew, as those which they did not know, or acknowledge to themselves. The dreams of childhood, the ravings of despair, were the toys of his fancy. Airy beings waited at his call, and came at his bidding. Harmless fairies “nodded to him, and did him curtesies”; and the night hag bestrode the blast at the command of “his so potent art.” The world of spirits lay open to him, like the world of real men and women: and there is the same truth in his delineations of the one as of the other; for if the preternatural characters he describes could be supposed to exist, they would speak, and feel, and act, as he makes them. He had only to think of any thing in order to become that thing, with all the circumstances belonging to it. When he conceived of a character, whether real or imaginary, he not only entered into all its thoughts and feelings, but seemed instantly, and as if by touching a secret spring, to be surrounded with all the same objects, “subject to the same skye influences,” the same local, outward, and unforeseen

1. This essay constituted the third in a series of Lectures on the English Poets that Hazlitt delivered with great success in London during January and February, 1818. It exemplifies Hazlitt’s typical procedure in criticism—the unsystematic piling of statement on statement; the emphasis on particular lines or passages; the relish for the brief, intense expression; the sudden flashes of critical insight. It also develops one of Hazlitt’s major critical ideas, the distinction between Shakespeare’s objectivity and the subjectivity of Wordsworth and the “modern school,” who project their own egos and moods into everything they undertake to describe. Milton, according to Hazlitt, falls between. John Keats attended Hazlitt’s lectures, and the trace of Hazlitt’s ideas can be detected in Keats’s own poetic “axioms” and in his opposition of what he called Wordsworth’s “egotistical sublime” to the higher poetry exemplified by Shakespeare, who exists in his work only as he identifies himself, by sympathetic self-projection, with the characters that he imagines. See Keats’s letters of February 3, February 27, and October 27, 1818. 2. From a poem on Shakespeare prefixed to the Second Folio of his plays (1632). 3. See Shakespeare’s Cymbeline III.i.39–40. 4. Cf. A Midsummer Night’s Dream III.i.177. 5. See The Tempest V.i.50. 6. See Measure for Measure III.i.9.
accidents which would occur in reality. Thus the character of Caliban not only stands before us with a language and manners of its own, but the scenery and situation of the enchanted island he inhabits, the traditions of the place, its strange noises, its hidden recesses, “his frequent haunts and ancient neighborhood,” are given with a miraculous truth of nature, and with all the familiarity of an old recollection. The whole “coheres semblably together” in time, place, and circumstance. In reading this author, you do not merely learn what his characters say—you see their persons. By something expressed or understood, you are at no loss to decipher their peculiar physiognomy, the meaning of a look, the grouping, the by-play, as we might see it on the stage. A word, an epithet, paints a whole scene, or throws us back whole years in the history of the person represented. So (as it has been ingeniously remarked) when Prospero describes himself as left alone in the boat with his daughter, the epithet which he applies to her, “Me and thy crying self,” flings the imagination instantly back from the grown woman to the helpless condition of infancy, and places the first and most trying scene of his misfortunes before us, with all that he must have suffered in the interval. How well the silent anguish of Macduff is conveyed to the reader, by the friendly exposition of Malcolm—“What! man, ne’er pull your hat upon your brows!” Again, Hamlet, in the scene with Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, somewhat abruptly concludes his fine soliloquy on life by saying, “Man delights not me, nor woman neither, though by your smiling you seem to say so.” Which is explained by their answer—“My lord, we had no such stuff in our thoughts. But we smiled to think, if you delight not in man, what lenten entertainment the players shall receive from you, whom we met on the way”—as if while Hamlet was making this speech, his two old schoolfellows from Wittenberg had been really standing by, and he had seen them smiling by stealth, at the idea of the players crossing their minds. It is not “a combination and a form” of words, a set speech or two, a preconcerted theory of a character, that will do this: but all the persons concerned must have been present in the poet’s imagination, as at a kind of rehearsal; and whatever would have passed through their minds on the occasion, and have been observed by others, passed through his, and is made known to the reader.

The account of Ophelia’s death begins thus:

There is a willow hanging o’er a brook,
That shows its hoary leaves in the glassy stream. 

Now this is an instance of the same unconscious power of mind which is as true to nature as itself. The leaves of the willow are, in fact, white underneath, and it is this part of them which would appear “hoary” in the reflection in the brook. The same sort of intuitive power, the same faculty of bringing every object in nature, whether present or absent, before the mind’s eye, is observable in the speech of Cleopatra, when conjecturing what were the employments of Antony in his absence: “He’s speaking now, or murmuring, where’s my serpent of old Nile?” How fine to make Cleopatra have this consciousness of her own character, and to make her feel that it is this for which Antony is in love with her! She says, after the battle of Actium, when Antony has resolved to risk another fight, “It is my birthday; I had thought to have held it poor: but since my lord is

8. See Shakespeare, 2 Henry IV vi.73.
9. By Coleridge, in a lecture on Shakespeare given in December, 1811.
1. The Tempest I.i.132.
2. Macbeth IV.iii.208.
Antony again, I will be Cleopatra.”7 What other poet would have thought of such a casual resource of the imagination, or would have dared to avail himself of it? The thing happens in the play as it might have happened in fact.—That which, perhaps, more than any thing else distinguishes the dramatic productions of Shakespeare from all others is this wonderful truth and individuality of conception. Each of his characters is as much itself, and as absolutely independent of the rest, as well as of the author, as if they were living persons, not fictions of the mind. The poet may be said, for the time, to identify himself with the character he wishes to represent, and to pass from one to another, like the same soul successively animating different bodies. By an art like that of the ventriloquist, he throws his imagination out of himself, and makes every word appear to proceed from the mouth of the person in whose name it is given. His plays alone are properly expressions of the passions, not descriptions of them. His characters are real beings of flesh and blood; they speak like men, not like authors. One might suppose that he had stood by at the time, and overheard what passed. As in our dreams we hold conversations with ourselves, make remarks, or communicate intelligence, and have no idea of the answer which we shall receive, and which we ourselves make, till we hear it: so the dialogues in Shakespeare are carried on without any consciousness of what is to follow, without any appearance of preparation or premeditation. The gusts of passion come and go like sounds of music borne on the wind. Nothing is made out by formal inference and analogy, by climax and antithesis: all comes, or seems to come, immediately from nature. Each object and circumstance exists in his mind, as it would have existed in reality: each several train of thought and feeling goes on of itself, without confusion or effort. In the world of his imagination, everything has a life, a place, and being of its own! ***

The great fault of a modern school of poetry8 is that it is an experiment to reduce poetry to a mere effusion of natural sensibility; or what is worse, to divest it both of imaginary splendor and human passion, to surround the meanest objects with the morbid feelings and devouring egotism of the writers’ own minds. Milton and Shakespeare did not so understand poetry. They gave a more liberal interpretation both to nature and art. They did not do all they could to get rid of the one and the other, to fill up the dreary void with the Moods of their own Minds.9 They owe their power over the human mind to their having had a deeper sense than others of what was grand in the objects of nature, or affecting in the events of human life. But to the men I speak of there is nothing interesting, nothing heroic, but themselves. To them the fall of gods or of great men is the same. They do not enter into the feeling. They cannot understand the terms. They are even debarred from the last poor, paltry triumph over fallen greatness; for their minds reject, with a convulsive effort and intolerable loathing, the very idea that there ever was, or was thought to be, anything superior to themselves. All that has ever excited the attention or admiration of the world, they look upon with the most perfect indifference; and they are surprised to find that the world repays their indifference with scorn. “With what measure they mete, it has been meted to them again.”1

Shakespeare’s imagination is of the same plastic kind as his conception of character or passion. “It glances from heaven to earth, from earth to heaven.”2 Its

7. Ibid. III.xiii.185–87.
8. I.e., what Hazlitt elsewhere called “the Lake school of poetry,” of which “Mr. Wordsworth is at the head.” Hazlitt’s phrase, the “effusion of natural sensibility,” may echo Wordsworth’s claim that poetry is “the spontaneous overflow of natural feelings.”
9. Wordsworth had entitled one section of his Poems of 1807, “Moods of My Own Mind.”
movement is rapid and devious. It unites the most opposite extremes: or, as Puck
says, in boasting of his own feats, "puts a girdle round about the earth in forty min-
utes." He seems always hurrying from his subject, even while describing it; but
the stroke, like the lightning's, is sure as it is sudden. He takes the widest possible
range, but from that very range he has his choice of the greatest variety and apti-
tude of materials. He brings together images the most alike, but placed at the
greatest distance from each other; that is, found in circumstances of the greatest
dissimilitude. From the remoteness of his combinations, and the celerity with
which they are effected, they coalesce the more indissolubly together. The more
the thoughts are strangers to each other, and the longer they have been kept asun-
der, the more intimate does their union seem to become. Their felicity is equal to
their force. Their likeness is made more dazzling by their novelty. They startle, and
take the fancy prisoner in the same instant.

Shakespeare discovers in his writings little religious enthusiasm, and an
indifference to personal reputation; he had none of the bigotry of his age, and
his political prejudices were not very strong. In these respects, as well as in
every other, he formed a direct contrast to Milton. Milton's works are a per-
petual invocation to the Muses; a hymn to Fame. He had his thoughts con-
tantly fixed on the contemplation of the Hebrew theocracy, and of a perfect
commonwealth; and he seized the pen with a hand just warm from the touch
of the ark of faith. His religious zeal infused its character into his imagination;
so that he devotes himself with the same sense of duty to the cultivation of
his genius, as he did to the exercise of virtue, or the good of his country. The
spirit of the poet, the patriot, and the prophet vied with each other in his
breast. His mind appears to have held equal communion with the inspired
writers, and with the bards and sages of ancient Greece and Rome:

Blind Thamyris, and blind Maeonides,  
And Tiresias, and Phineus, prophets old.4

He had a high standard, with which he was always comparing himself, noth-
ing short of which could satisfy his jealous ambition. He thought of nobler
forms and nobler things than those he found about him. He lived apart, in the
solitude of his own thoughts, carefully excluding from his mind whatever might
distract its purposes or alloy its purity, or damp its zeal. "With darkness and
with dangers compassed round," he had the mighty models of antiquity
always present to his thoughts, and determined to raise a monument of equal
height and glory, "piling up every stone of luster from the brook," for the
delight and wonder of posterity. He had girded himself up, and as it were, sanc-
tified his genius to this service from his youth.

Milton has borrowed more than any other writer, and exhausted every source
of imitation, sacred or profane; yet he is perfectly distinct from every other
writer. He is a writer of centos, and yet in originality scarcely inferior to Homer.
The power of his mind is stamped on every line. The fervor of his imagination
melts down and renders malleable, as in a furnace, the most contradictory mate-
rials. In reading his works, we feel ourselves under the influence of a mighty
intellect, that the nearer it approaches to others becomes more distinct from
them. The quantity of art in him shows the strength of his genius: the weight of
his intellectual obligations would have oppressed any other writer. Milton's

3. Cf. *ibid.* II.i.175–76.  
7. Literary compositions made up of quotations from other works.
learning has the effect of intuition. He describes objects, of which he could only have read in books, with the vividness of actual observation. His imagination has the force of nature. He makes words tell as pictures.

Him followed Rimmon, whose delightful seat
Was fair Damascus, on the fertile banks
Of Abbana and Pharphar, lucid streams.8

The word *lucid* here gives to the idea all the sparkling effect of the most perfect landscape.

And again:

As when a vulture on Imaus bred,
Whose snowy ridge the roving Tartar bounds,
Dislodging from a region scarce of prey,
To gorge the flesh of lambs and yeanling kids
On hills where flocks are fed, flies towards the springs
Of Ganges or Hydaspes, Indian streams;
But in his way lights on the barren plains
Of Sericana, where Chineses drive
With sails and wind their cany wagons light.9

If Milton had taken a journey for the express purpose, he could not have described this scenery and mode of life better. Such passages are like demonstrations of natural history. Instances might be multiplied without end.

We might be tempted to suppose that the vividness with which he describes visible objects was owing to their having acquired an unusual degree of strength in his mind, after the privation of his sight; but we find the same palpableness and truth in the descriptions which occur in his early poems. In *Lycidas* he speaks of “the great vision of the guarded mount,”1 with that preternatural weight of impression with which it would present itself suddenly to “the pilot of some small night-foundered skiff”;2 and the lines in the *Penseroso*, describing “the wandering moon,”

Riding near her highest noon,
Like one that had been led astray
Through the heaven’s wide pathless way,3

are as if he had gazed himself blind in looking at her. There is also the same depth of impression in his descriptions of the objects of all the different senses, whether colors, or sounds, or smells—the same absorption of his mind in whatever engaged his attention at the time. It has been indeed objected to Milton, by a common perversity of criticism, that his ideas were musical rather than picturesque, as if because they were in the highest degree musical, they must be (to keep the sage critical balance even, and to allow no one man to possess two qualities at the same time) proportionally deficient in other respects. But Milton’s poetry is not cast in any such narrow, commonplace mold; it is not so barren of resources. His worship of the Muse was not so simple or confined. A sound arises “like a steam of rich distilled perfumes”;4 we hear the pealing organ, but the incense on the altars is also there, and the statues of the gods are ranged around! The ear indeed predominates over the eye, because it is

1. Line 161.
2. *Paradise Lost* I.204.
3. Lines 67–70.
4. *Comus*, line 556.
more immediately affected, and because the language of music blends more immediately with, and forms a more natural accompaniment to, the variable and indefinite associations of ideas conveyed by words. But where the associations of the imagination are not the principal thing, the individual object is given by Milton with equal force and beauty. The strongest and best proof of this, as a characteristic power of his mind, is that the persons of Adam and Eve, of Satan, etc., are always accompanied, in our imagination, with the grandeur of the naked figure; they convey to us the ideas of sculpture.

Again, nothing can be more magnificent than the portrait of Beelzebub:

With Atlantean shoulders fit to bear
The weight of mightiest monarchies:

Or the comparison of Satan, as he “lay floating many a rood,” to “that sea beast,”

Leviathan, which God of all his works
Created hugest that swim the ocean-stream!

What a force of imagination is there in this last expression! What an idea it conveys of the size of that hugest of created beings, as if it shrunk up the ocean to a stream, and took up the sea in its nostrils as a very little thing! Force of style is one of Milton’s greatest excellences. Hence, perhaps, he stimulates us more in the reading, and less afterwards. The way to defend Milton against all impugners is to take down the book and read it.

To proceed to a consideration of the merits of Paradise Lost, in the most essential point of view, I mean as to the poetry of character and passion. I shall say nothing of the fable, or of other technical objections or excellences; but I shall try to explain at once the foundation of the interest belonging to the poem. I am ready to give up the dialogues in Heaven, where, as Pope justly observes, “God the Father turns a school-divine”; nor do I consider the battle of the angels as the climax of sublimity, or the most successful effort of Milton’s pen. In a word, the interest of the poem arises from the daring ambition and fierce passions of Satan, and from the account of the paradisaical happiness, and the loss of it by our first parents. Three-fourths of the work are taken up with these characters, and nearly all that relates to them is unmixed sublimity and beauty. The two first books alone are like two massy pillars of solid gold.

Satan is the most heroic subject that ever was chosen for a poem; and the execution is as perfect as the design is lofty. He was the first of created beings, who, for endeavoring to be equal with the highest, and to divide the empire of heaven with the Almighty, was hurled down to hell. His aim was no less than the throne of the universe; his means, myriads of angelic armies bright, the third part of the heavens, whom he lured after him with his countenance, and who durst defy the Omnipotent in arms. His ambition was the greatest, and his punishment was the greatest; but not so his despair, for his fortitude was as great as his sufferings. His strength of mind was matchless as his strength of body; the vastness of his designs did not surpass the firm, inflexible determination with which he submitted to his irreversible doom, and final loss of all good. His power of action and of suffering was equal. He was the greatest power that was ever overthrown, with the strongest will left to resist or to endure. He was baffled, not confounded. He stood like a tower; or

7. Pope’s Horatian Epistle to Augustus, lines 101–2.
As when Heaven’s fire
Hath scathed the forest oaks or mountain pines.8

He was still surrounded with hosts of rebel angels, armed warriors, who own
him as their sovereign leader, and with whose fate he sympathizes as he views
them round, far as the eye can reach; though he keeps aloof from them in his
own mind, and holds supreme counsel only with his own breast. An outcast
from Heaven, Hell trembles beneath his feet, Sin and Death are at his heels,
and mankind are his easy prey.

All is not lost; th’ unconquerable will,
And study of revenge, immortal hate,
And courage never to submit or yield,
And what else is not to be overcome,9

are still his. The sense of his punishment seems lost in the magnitude of it; the
fierceness of tormenting flames is qualified and made innoxious by the greater
fierceness of his pride; the loss of infinite happiness to himself is compensated
in thought, by the power of inflicting infinite misery on others. Yet Satan is not
the principle of malignity, or of the abstract love of evil—but of the abstract
love of power, of pride, of self-will personified, to which last principle all other
good and evil, and even his own, are subordinate. From this principle he never
once flinches. His love of power and contempt for suffering are never once
relaxed from the highest pitch of intensity. His thoughts burn like a hell within
him; but the power of thought holds dominion in his mind over every other
consideration. The consciousness of a determined purpose, of “that intellec-
tual being, those thoughts that wander through eternity,” though accompanied
with endless pain, he prefers to nonentity, to “being swallowed up and lost in
the wide womb of uncreated night.”1 He expresses the sum and substance of
all ambition in one line. “Fallen cherub, to be weak is miserable, doing or suf-
fering!”2 After such a conflict as his, and such a defeat, to retreat in order, to
rally, to make terms, to exist at all, is something; but he does more than this—
he founds a new empire in hell, and from it conquers this new world, whither
he bends his undaunted flight, forcing his way through nether and surround-
ing fires. The poet has not in all this given us a mere shadowy outline; the
strength is equal to the magnitude of the conception. The Achilles of Homer
is not more distinct; the Titans were not more vast; Prometheus chained to his
rock was not a more terrific example of suffering and of crime. Wherever the
figure of Satan is introduced, whether he walks or flies, “rising aloft incumbent
on the dusky air,”3 it is illustrated with the most striking and appropriate
images: so that we see it always before us, gigantic, irregular, portentous,
uneasy, and disturbed—but dazzling in its faded splendor, the clouded ruins of
a god. The deformity of Satan is only in the depravity of his will; he has no bod-
ily deformity to excite our loathing or disgust. The horns and tail are not there,
poor emblems of the unbending, unconquered spirit, of the writhing agonies
within. Milton was too magnanimous and open an antagonist to support his
argument by the by-tricks of a hump and cloven foot; to bring into the fair field
of controversy the good old Catholic prejudices of which Tasso and Dante have
availed themselves, and which the mystic German critics would restore. He

1. See ibid. II.147–50. These words are spoken by
Belial, not Satan.
2. Ibid. I.157–58.
relied on the justice of his cause, and did not scruple to give the devil his due. Some persons may think that he has carried his liberality too far, and injured the cause he professed to espouse by making him the chief person in his poem. Considering the nature of his subject, he would be equally in danger of running into this fault, from his faith in religion, and his love of rebellion; and perhaps each of these motives had its full share in determining the choice of his subject.

From The Fight

* * * The morning dawns; that dim but yet clear light appears, which weighs like solid bars of metal on the sleepless eyelids; the guests drop down from their chambers one by one—but it was too late to think of going to bed now (the clock was on the stroke of seven), we had nothing for it but to find a barber’s (the pole that glittered in the morning sun lighted us to his shop), and then a nine miles’ march to Hungerford. The day was fine, the sky was blue, the mists were retiring from the marshy ground, the path was tolerably dry, the sitting up all night had not done us much harm—at least the cause was good; we talked of this and that with amicable difference, roving and sipping of many subjects, but still invariably we returned to the fight. At length, a mile to the left of Hungerford, on a gentle eminence, we saw the ring surrounded by covered carts, gigs, and carriages, of which hundreds had passed us on the road; Toms gave a youthful shout, and we hastened down a narrow lane to the scene of action.

Reader, have you ever seen a fight? If not, you have a pleasure to come, at least if it is a fight like that between the Gas-man and Bill Neate. The crowd was very great when we arrived on the spot; open carriages were coming up, with streamers flying and music playing, and the country people were pouring in over hedge and ditch in all directions, to see their hero beat or be beaten. The odds were still on Gas, but only about five to four. Gully had been down to try Neate, and had backed him considerably, which was a damper to the sanguine confidence of the adverse party. About two hundred thousand pounds were pending. The Gas says he has lost £3000 which were promised him by different gentlemen if he had won. He had presumed too much on himself, which had made others presume on him. This spirited and formidable young fellow seems to have taken for his motto the old maxim that “there are three things necessary to success in life—Impudence! Impudence! Impudence!” It is so in matters of opinion, but not in the Fancy, which is the most practical of all things, though even here confidence is half the battle, but only half. Our friend had vaporied and swaggered too much, as if he wanted to grin and bully his adversary out of the fight. “Alas! the Bristol man was not so tamed!”

1. The famous prize fight between Tom Hickman, “the Gas-man,” and Bill Neate on December 11, 1821, which was fought in the early 19th-century style, with bare fists and no limit on the number of rounds. Hazlitt’s report was published a few months later; it has set a standard of excellence, not only for sports reporting, but for all descriptions of violent human action, since that time. The first part of the essay, which is here omitted, describes how Hazlitt managed to make his way to the vicinity of the fight (its location had to be kept secret from the authorities) and sat up all night at an inn talking with fellow aficionados of the sport.
2. John Gully, a notable prizefighter, recently retired.
3. A slang term for the fighting game.
4. Blustered.
5. Altered from Cowper, The Task II.322.
the grave-digger,” would Tom Hickman exclaim in the moments of intoxication from gin and success, showing his tremendous right hand, “this will send many of them to their long homes; I haven’t done with them yet!” Why should he—though he had licked four of the best men within the hour, yet why should he threaten to inflict dishonorable chastisement on my old master Richmond, a veteran going off the stage, and who has borne his sable honors meekly? Magnanimity, my dear Tom, and bravery, should be inseparable. Or why should he go up to his antagonist, the first time he ever saw him at the Fives Court, and measuring him from head to foot with a glance of contempt, as Achilles surveyed Hector, say to him, “What, are you Bill Neate? I’ll knock more blood out of that great carcass of thine, this day fortnight, than you ever knocked out of a bullock’s!” It was not manly, ’twas not fighter-like. If he was sure of the victory (as he was not), the less said about it the better. Modesty should accompany the Fancy as its shadow. The best men were always the best behaved. Jem Belcher, the Game Chicken (before whom the Gas-man could not have lived) were civil, silent men. So is Cribb, so is Tom Belcher, the most elegant of sparrings, and not a man for every one to take by the nose. I enlarged on this topic in the mail (while Turtle was asleep), and said very wisely (as I thought) that impertinence was a part of no profession. A boxer was bound to beat his man, but not to thrust his fist, either actually or by implication, in everyone’s face. Even a highwayman, in the way of trade, may blow out your brains, but if he uses foul language at the same time, I should say he was no gentleman. A boxer, I would infer, need not be a blackguard or a coxcomb, more than another. Perhaps I press this point too much on a fallen man—Mr. Thomas Hickman has by this time learnt that first of all lessons, “That man was made to mourn.” He has lost nothing by the late fight but his presumption; and that every man may do as well without! By an over-display of this quality, however, the public had been prejudiced against him, and the knowing-ones were taken in. Few but those who had bet on him wished Gas to win. With my own prepossessions on the subject, the result of the 11th of December appeared to me as fine a piece of poetical justice as I had ever witnessed. The difference of weight between the two combatants (14 stone to 12) was nothing to the sporting men. Great, heavy, clumsy, long-armed Bill Neate kicked the beam in the scale of the Gas-man’s vanity. The amateurs were frightened at his big words, and thought that they would make up for the difference of six feet and five feet nine. Truly, the Fancy are not men of imagination. They judge of what has been, and cannot conceive of anything that is to be. The Gas-man had won hitherto; therefore he must beat a man half as big again as himself—and that to a certainty. Besides, there are as many feuds, factions, prejudices, pedantic notions in the Fancy as in the state or in the schools. Mr. Gully is almost the only cool, sensible man among them, who exercises an unbiased discretion, and is not a slave to his passions in these matters. But enough of reflections, and to our tale. The day, as I have said, was fine for a December morning. The grass was wet, and the ground miry, and plowed up with multitudinous feet, except that, within

6. Bill Richmond, a colored boxer, now an instructor; he had apparently given boxing lessons to Hazlitt.
7. A building near Leicester Square used for various sports, including boxing. “Fives” is a form of handball.
8. During the single combat of these champions before the walls of Troy (Iliad XXII).
9. Henry Pearce, who, like Jem Belcher, his teacher, was a famous fighter.
1. The Bath mail coach, on which Hazlitt had ridden to the fight with Tom Turtle, a trainer.
2. Title of a poem by Robert Burns.
3. A “stone” is fourteen pounds, so that in his heavyweight bout, Neate weighed 196 pounds and the Gas-man 168.
the ring itself, there was a spot of virgin green closed in and unprofaned by vul-
gar tread, that shone with dazzling brightness in the midday sun. For it was now
noon, and we had an hour to wait. This is the trying time. It is then the heart
sickens, as you think what the two champions are about, and how short a time
will determine their fate. After the first blow is struck, there is no opportunity
for nervous apprehensions; you are swallowed up in the immediate interest of
the scene—but

Between the acting of a dreadful thing
And the first motion, all the interim is
Like a phantasma or a hideous dream. 4

I found it so as I felt the sun’s rays clinging to my back, and saw the white win-
try clouds sink below the verge of the horizon. “So,” I thought, “my fairest
hopes have faded from my sight!—so will the Gas-man’s glory, or that of his
adversary, vanish in an hour.” The swells 5 were parading in their white box
coats, the outer ring was cleared with some bruises on the heads and shins of
the rustic assembly (for the cockneys 6 had been distanced by the sixty-six
miles 6); the time drew near, I had got a good stand; a bustle, a buzz, ran through
the crowd, and from the opposite side entered Neate, between his second and
bottle-holder. He rolled along, swathed in his loose great coat, his knock-knees
bending under his huge bulk; and, with a modest cheerful air, threw his hat
into the ring. He then just looked round, and began quietly to undress; when
from the other side there was a similar rush and an opening made, and the Gas-
man came forward with a conscious air of anticipated triumph, too much like
the cock-of-the walk. He strutted about more than became a hero, sucked
oranges with a supercilious air, and threw away the skin with a toss of his head,
and went up and looked at Neate, which was an act of supererogation. The only
sensible thing he did was, as he strode away from the modern Ajax, to fling out
his arms, as if he wanted to try whether they would do their work that day. By
this time they had stripped, and presented a strong contrast in appearance. If
Neate was like Ajax, “with Atlantean shoulders, fit to bear” 7 the pugilistic re-
putation of all Bristol, Hickman might be compared to Diomed, 8 light, vigorous,
elastic, and his back glistened in the sun, as he moved about, like a panther’s
hide. There was now a dead pause—attention was awestruck. Who at that
moment, big with a great event, did not draw his breath short—did not feel his
heart throb? All was ready. They tossed up for the sun, 9 and the Gas-man won.
They were led up to the scratch 1—shook hands, and went at it.

In the first round 2 everyone thought it was all over. After making play a short
time, the Gas-man flew at his adversary like a tiger, struck five blows in as many
seconds, three first, and then following him as he staggered back, two more, right
and left, and down he fell, a mighty ruin. There was a shout, and I said, “There
is no standing this.” Neate seemed like a lifeless lump of flesh and bone, round
which the Gas-man’s blows played with the rapidity of electricity or lightning,

4. Shakespeare’s Julius Caesar II.i.63–65.
5. Gentlemen of fashion, dressed in “box coats” (heavy overcoats for driving a carriage; the “box” is
the driver’s seat).
6. I.e., the Londoners (“cockneys”), having a long
distance to come, found that the countrymen had
taken the best posts.
7. Paradise Lost II.306; “Atlantean” is the adjectival
form of Atlas, the Titan who supports the heavens.
8. A Greek warrior in the Iliad.
9. To determine which fighter should face into the
sun.
1. The line drawn across the ring, at which boxers
formerly joined battle.
2. By the old rules, each “round” was ended by a
knockdown. In this match there was a half-minute
interval between rounds, and the fight ended when
one of the boxers failed to take his feet in time for
the next round.
and you imagined he would only be lifted up to be knocked down again. It was as if Hickman held a sword or a fire in that right hand of his, and directed it against an unarmed body. They met again, and Neate seemed, not cowed, but particularly cautious. I saw his teeth clenched together and his brows knit close against the sun. He held out both his arms at full length straight before him, like two sledge hammers, and raised his left an inch or two higher. The Gasman could not get over this guard—they struck mutually and fell, but without advantage on either side. It was the same in the next round; but the balance of power was thus restored—the fate of the battle was suspended. No one could tell how it would end. This was the only moment in which opinion was divided; for, in the next, the Gas-man aiming a mortal blow at his adversary’s neck with his right hand, and failing from the length he had to reach, the other returned it with his left at full swing, planted a tremendous blow on his cheek-bone and eyebrow, and made a red ruin of that side of his face. The Gas-man went down, and there was another shout—a roar of triumph as the waves of fortune rolled tumultuously from side to side. This was a settler. Hickman got up, and “grinned horrible a ghastly smile,” yet he was evidently dashed in his opinion of himself; it was the first time he had ever been so punished; all one side of his face was perfect scarlet, and his right eye was closed in dingy blackness, as he advanced to the fight, less confident, but still determined. After one or two rounds, not receiving another such remembrancer, he rallied and went at it with his former impetuosity. But in vain. His strength had been weakened—his blows could not tell at such a distance—he was obliged to fling himself at his adversary, and could not strike from his feet; and almost as regularly as he flew at him with his right hand, Neate warded the blow, or drew back out of its reach, and felled him with the return of his left. There was little cautious sparring—no half-hits—no tapping and trifling, none of the petit-maîtreship of the art—they were almost all knock-down blows: the fight was a good stand-up fight. The wonder was the half-minute time. If there had been a minute or more allowed between each round, it would have been intelligible how they should by degrees recover strength and resolution; but to see two men smashed to the ground, smeared with gore, stunned, senseless, the breath beaten out of their bodies; and then, before you recover from the shock, to see them rise up with new strength and courage, stand ready to inflict or receive mortal offense, and rush upon each other “like two clouds over the Caspian”—this is the most astonishing thing of all: this is the high and heroic state of man! From this time forward the event became more certain every round, and about the twelfth it seemed as if it must have been over. Hickman generally stood with his back to me; but in the scuffle, he had changed positions, and Neate just then made a tremendous lunge at him, and hit him full in the face. It was doubtful whether he would fall backwards or forwards; he hung suspended for a second or two, and then fell back, throwing his hands in the air, and with his face lifted up to the sky. I never saw anything more terrific than his aspect just before he fell. All traces of life, of natural expression, were gone from him. His face was like a human skull, a death’s-head, spouting blood. The eyes were filled with blood, the nose streamed with blood, the mouth gaped blood. He was not like an actual man, but like a preternatural, spectral appearance, or like one of the figures in Dante’s Inferno. Yet he fought on after this for several rounds, still striking the
first desperate blow, and Neate standing on the defensive, and using the same cautious guard to the last, as if he had still all his work to do; and it was not till the Gas-man was so stunned in the seventeenth or eighteenth round that his senses forsook him, and he could not come to time, that the battle was declared over. Ye who despise the Fancy, do something to show as much pluck, or as much self-possession as this, before you assume a superiority which you have never given a single proof of by any one action in the whole course of your lives! When the Gas-man came to himself, the first words he uttered were, “Where am I? What is the matter?” “Nothing is the matter, Tom—you have lost the battle, but you are the bravest man alive.” And Jackson whispered to him, “I am collecting a purse for you, Tom.”—Vain sounds, and unheard at that moment! Neate instantly went up and shook him cordially by the hand, and seeing some old acquaintance, began to flourish with his fists, calling out, “Ah, you always said I couldn’t fight. What do you think now?” But all in good humor, and without any appearance of arrogance; only it was evident Bill Neate was pleased that he had won the fight. When it was over, I asked Cribb if he did not think it was a good one? He said, “Pretty well!”

The carrier pigeons now mounted into the air, and one of them flew with the news of her husband’s victory to the bosom of Mrs. Neate. Alas, for Mrs. Hickman!

Mais au revoir, as Sir Fopling Flutter says. I went down with Toms; I returned with Jack Pigott, whom I met on the ground. Toms is a rattle brain; Pigott is a sentimentalist. Now, under favor, I am a sentimentalist too—therefore I say nothing, but that the interest of the excursion did not flag as I came back. Pigott and I marched along the causeway leading from Hungerford to Newbury, now observing the effect of a brilliant sun on the tawny meads or moss-colored cottages, now exulting in the fight, now digressing to some topic of general and elegant literature. My friend was dressed in character for the occasion, or like one of the Fancy; that is, with a double portion of greatcoats, clogs, and overhauls: and just as we had agreed with a couple of country lads to carry his superfluous wearing apparel to the next town, we were overtaken by a return post-chaise, into which I got, Pigott preferring a seat on the bar. There were two strangers already in the chaise, and on their observing they supposed I had been to the fight, I said I had, and concluded they had done the same. They appeared, however, a little shy and sore on the subject, and it was not till after several hints dropped, and questions put, that it turned out that they had missed it. One of these friends had undertaken to drive the other there in his gig: they had set out, to make sure work, the day before at three in the afternoon. The owner of the one-horse vehicle scorned to ask his way, and drove right on to Bagshot, instead of turning off at Hounslow: there they stopped all night, and set off the next day across the country to Reading, from whence they took coach, and got down within a mile or two of Hungerford, just half an hour after the fight was over. This might be safely set down as one of the miseries of human life. We parted with these two gentlemen who had been to see the fight, but had returned as they went, at Wolhampton, where we were promised beds (an irresistible temptation, for Pigott had passed the preceding night at Hungerford as we had done at Newbury), and we turned into an old bow-windowed parlor with a carpet and a snug fire; and after devouring a quantity of tea, toast, and eggs, sat down to consider, during an hour of philosophic

---

7. Stout, thick-soled shoes; “overhauls” are overalls.
leisure, what we should have for supper. In the midst of an Epicurean deliberation between a roasted fowl and mutton chops with mashed potatoes, we were interrupted by an inroad of Goths and Vandals—O procul este profani—not real flash-men, but interlopers, noisy pretenders, butchers from Tothill Fields, brokers from Whitechapel, who called immediately for pipes and tobacco, hoping it would not be disagreeable to the gentlemen, and began to insist that it was a cross. Pigott withdrew from the smoke and noise into another room, and left me to dispute the point with them for a couple of hours sans intermission by the dial. The next morning we rose refreshed; and on observing that Jack had a pocket volume in his hand, in which he read in the intervals of our discourse, I inquired what it was, and learned to my particular satisfaction that it was a volume of the New Eloise. Ladies, after this, will you contend that a love for the Fancy is incompatible with the cultivation of sentiment? We jogged on as before, my friend setting me up in a genteel drab greatcoat and green silk handkerchief (which I must say became me exceedingly), and after stretching our legs for a few miles, and seeing Jack Randall, Ned Turner, and Scroggins, pass on the top of one of the Bath coaches, we engaged with the driver of the second to take us to London for the usual fee. I got inside, and found three other passengers. One of them was an old gentleman with an aquiline nose, powdered hair, and a pigtail, and who looked as if he had played many a rubber at the Bath rooms. I said to myself, he is very like Mr. Windham; I wish he would enter into conversation, that I might hear what fine observations would come from those finely-turned features. However, nothing passed, till, stopping to dine at Reading, some inquiry was made by the company about the fight, and I gave (as the reader may believe) an eloquent and animated description of it. When we got into the coach again, the old gentleman, after a graceful exordium, said, he had, when a boy, been to a fight between the famous Broughton and George Stevenson, who was called the Fighting Coachman, in the year 1770, with the late Mr. Windham. This beginning flattered the spirit of prophecy within me and riveted my attention. He went on—George Stevenson was coachman to a friend of my father's. He was an old man when I saw him some years afterwards. He took hold of his own arm and said, 'there was muscle here once, but now it is no more than this young gentleman's.' He added, 'Well, no matter; I have been here long, I am willing to go hence, and I hope I have done no more harm than another man.' Once,” said my unknown companion, “I asked him if he had ever beat Broughton? He said yes; that he had fought with him three times, and the last time he fairly beat him, though the world did not allow it. 'I'll tell you how it was, master. When the seconds lifted us up in the last round, we were so exhausted that neither of us could stand, and we fell upon one another, and as Master Broughton fell uppermost, the mob gave it in his favor, and he was said to have won the battle. But,’ says he, ‘the fact was, that as his second (John Cuthbert) lifted him up, he said to him, “I'll fight no more, I've had enough”; which,’ says Stevenson, ‘you know gave me the victory. And to prove to you that this was the case, when John Cuthbert was on his deathbed, and they asked him if there was anything on his mind which he wished to confess, he answered, “Yes, that there was one thing

1. I.e., that the fight was fixed.
2. “Without intermission, according to the clock.”
   See As You Like It II.vii. 32–33.
3. La Nouvelle Héloïse, novel by Rousseau.
4. In the card rooms at Bath, a resort town.
5. The formal opening of an oration.
he wished to set right, for that certainly Master Stevenson won that last fight with Master Broughton; for he whispered him as he lifted him up in the last round of all, that he had had enough.” “This,” said the Bath gentleman, “was a bit of human nature”; and I have written this account of the fight on purpose that it might not be lost to the world. He also stated as a proof of the candor of mind in this class of men, that Stevenson acknowledged that Broughton could have beat him in his best day; but that he (Broughton) was getting old in their last rencontre. When we stopped in Piccadilly, I wanted to ask the gentleman some questions about the late Mr. Windham, but had not courage. I got out, resigned my coat and green silk handkerchief to Pigott (loath to part with these ornaments of life), and walked home in high spirits.

P.S. Toms called upon me the next day, to ask me if I did not think the fight was a complete thing? I said I thought it was. I hope he will relish my account of it.

On Going a Journey

One of the pleasantest things in the world is going a journey; but I like to go by myself. I can enjoy society in a room; but out of doors, nature is company enough for me. I am then never less alone than when alone.

The fields his study, nature was his book.¹

I cannot see the wit of walking and talking at the same time. When I am in the country, I wish to vegetate like the country. I am not for criticizing hedgerows and black cattle. I go out of town in order to forget the town and all that is in it. There are those who for this purpose go to watering places;² and carry the metropolis with them. I like more elbowroom, and fewer encumbrances. I like solitude, when I give myself up to it, for the sake of solitude; nor do I ask for

—a friend in my retreat,  
Whom I may whisper solitude is sweet.³

The soul of a journey is liberty, perfect liberty, to think, feel, do just as one pleases. We go a journey chiefly to be free of all impediments and of all inconveniences; to leave ourselves behind, much more to get rid of others. It is because I want a little breathing space to muse on indifferent matters, where Contemplation

May plume her feathers and let grow her wings,  
That in the various bustle of resort  
Were all too ruffled, and sometimes impaired,⁴ that I absent myself from the town for awhile, without feeling at a loss the moment I am left by myself. Instead of a friend in a post chaise or in a tilbury,⁵ to exchange good things with, and vary the same stale topics over again, for

---

1. Spring, line 32, in The Farmer’s Boy (1800) by Robert Bloomfield, a peasant poet.  
2. Bathing resorts.  
3. William Cowper, Retirement (1782), lines 741–42.  
5. Lightweight, open, two-wheeled carriage; “post chaise”: hired carriage.
once let me have a truce with impertinence. Give me the clear blue sky over
my head, and the green turf beneath my feet, a winding road before me, and
a three hours’ march to dinner—and then to thinking! It is hard if I cannot start
some game on these lone heaths. I laugh, I run, I leap, I sing for joy. From the
point of yonder rolling cloud, I plunge into my past being, and revel there, as
the sunburnt Indian plunges headlong into the wave that wafts him to his
native shore. Then long-forgotten things, like “sunken wrack and sumless trea-
suries,”7 burst upon my eager sight, and I begin to feel, think, and be myself
again. Instead of an awkward silence, broken by attempts at wit or dull com-
monplaces, mine is that undisturbed silence of the heart which alone is per-
flect eloquence. No one likes puns, alliterations, antitheses, argument, and
analysis better than I do; but I sometimes had rather be without them. “Leave,
oh, leave me to my repose!”8 I have just now other business in hand, which
would seem idle to you, but is with me “the very stuff of the conscience.”9 Is
not this wild rose sweet without a comment? Does not this daisy leap to my
heart, set in its coat of emerald? Yet if I were to explain to you the circumstance
that has so endeared it to me, you would only smile. Had I not better then keep
it to myself, and let it serve me to brood over, from here to yonder craggy point,
and from thence onward to the far distant horizon? I should be but bad com-
pany all that way, and therefore prefer being alone. I have heard it said that you
may, when the moody fit comes on, walk or ride on by yourself, and indulge
your reveries. But this looks like a breach of manners, a neglect of others, and
you are thinking all the time that you ought to rejoin your party. “Out upon
such half-faced fellowship,”9 say I. I like to be either entirely to myself, or
entirely at the disposal of others; to talk or be silent, to walk or sit still, to be
sociable or solitary. I was pleased with an observation of Mr. Cobbett’s,1 that
“She thought it a bad French custom to drink our wine with our meals, and that
an Englishman ought to do only one thing at a time.” So I cannot talk and
think, or indulge in melancholy musing and lively conversation by fits and
starts. “Let me have a companion of my way,” says Sterne, “were it but to
remark how the shadows lengthen as the sun goes down.”2 It is beautifully said:
but in my opinion, this continual comparing of notes interferes with the invol-
untary impression of things upon the mind, and hurts the sentiment. If you
only hint what you feel in a kind of dumb show,3 it is insipid; if you have to
explain it, it is making a toil of a pleasure. You cannot read the book of nature,
without being perpetually put to the trouble of translating it for the benefit of
others. I am for the synthetical method on a journey, in preference to the ana-
lytical. I am content to lay in a stock of ideas then, and to examine and anato-
mize them afterwards. I want to see my vague notions float like the down of the
thistle before the breeze, and not to have them entangled in the briars and
thorns of controversy. For once, I like to have it all my own way; and this is
impossible unless you are alone, or in such company as I do not covet. I have
no objection to argue a point with any one for twenty miles of measured road,
but not for pleasure. If you remark the scent of a beanfield crossing the road,
perhaps your fellow traveler has no smell. If you point to a distant object, per-
haps he is shortsighted, and has to take out his glass to look at it. There is

7. A refrain in Thomas Gray’s The Descent of
Odin: An Ode (1768).
8. Shakespeare’s Othello I.ii.2.
9. An episode of pantomime in early English dra-
mas.
a feeling in the air, a tone in the color of a cloud which hits your fancy, but the
effect of which you are unprepared to account for. There is then no sympathy,
but an uneasy craving after it, and a dissatisfaction which pursues you on the
way, and in the end probably produces ill humor. Now I never quarrel with
myself, and take all my own conclusions for granted till I find it necessary to
defend them against objections. It is not merely that you may not be of accord
on the objects and circumstances that present themselves before you—they
may recall a number of ideas, and lead to associations too delicate and refined
to be possibly communicated to others. Yet these I love to cherish, and some-
times still fondly clutch them, when I can escape from the throng to do so. To
give way to our feelings before company seems extravagance or affectation; on
the other hand, to have to unravel this mystery of our being at every turn, and
to make others take an equal interest in it (otherwise the end is not answered)
is a task to which few are competent. We must “give it an understanding, but
no tongue.”

My old friend C——, however, could do both. He could go on in
the most delightful explanatory way over hill and dale, a summer’s day, and con-
vert a landscape into a didactic poem or a Pindaric ode. “He talked far above
singing.” If I could so clothe my ideas in sounding and flowing words, I might
perhaps wish to have someone with me to admire the swelling theme; or I could
be more content, were it possible for me still to hear his echoing voice in the
woods of All-Foxden. They had “that fine madness in them which our first
poets had”; and if they could have been caught by some rare instrument,
would have breathed such strains as the following.

—Here be woods as green
As any, air likewise as fresh and sweet
As when smooth Zephyrus plays on the fleet
Face of the curled stream, with flow’rs as many
As the young spring gives, and as choice as any;
Here be all new delights, cool streams and wells,
Arbors o’ergrown with woodbine, caves, and dells:
Choose where thou wilt, while I sit by and sing,
Or gather rushes to make many a ring
For thy long fingers; tell thee tales of love,
How the pale Phoebe, hunting in a grove,
First saw the boy Endymion, from whose eyes
She took eternal fire that never dies;
How she conveyed him softly in a sleep,
His temples bound with poppy, to the steep
Head of old Latmos, where she stoops each night,
Gilding the mountain with her brother’s light,
To kiss her sweetest.—

FAITHFUL SHEPHERDESS.

Had I words and images at command like these, I would attempt to wake the
thoughts that lie slumbering on golden ridges in the evening clouds: but at the

4. *Hamlet* I.i.250.
5. Coleridge.
above singing.”
7. Hazlitt had visited Coleridge and Wordsworth at Alfoxden, Somersetshire, in 1798; see *My First
Acquaintance with Poets.*
9. John Fletcher, *The Faithful Shepherdess* (a pastoral drama, 1610), Liii. Phoebe (also known as
Diana) is the moon goddess who fell in love with the handsome young shepherd, Endymion, on
Mount Latmus, in southwestern Asia Minor. “Her brother’s light” is that of Apollo, the sun god.
sight of nature my fancy, poor as it is, droops and closes up its leaves, like flow-
ers at sunset. I can make nothing out on the spot: I must have time to collect
myself.

In general, a good thing spoils out-of-door prospects: it should be reserved
for table talk. L—— 1 is for this reason, I take it, the worst company in the world
out of doors; because he is the best within. I grant, there is one subject on
which it is pleasant to talk on a journey; and that is, what one shall have for
supper when we get to our inn at night. The open air improves this sort of con-
versation or friendly altercation, by setting a keener edge on appetite. Every
mile of the road heightens the flavor of the viands we expect at the end of it.
How fine it is to enter some old town, walled and turreted, just at the approach
of nightfall, or to come to some straggling village, with the lights streaming
through the surrounding gloom; and then after inquiring for the best enter-
tainment that the place affords, to “take one’s ease at one’s inn!”2 These event-
ful moments in our lives are in fact too precious, too full of solid, heartfelt
happiness to be frittered and dribbled away in imperfect sympathy. I would
have them all to myself, and drain them to the last drop: they will do to talk of
or to write about afterwards. What a delicate speculation it is, after drinking
whole goblets of tea,

The cups that cheer, but not inebriate, 3

and letting the fumes ascend into the brain, to sit considering what we shall
have for supper—eggs and a rasher, 4 a rabbit smothered in onions, or an excel-
 lent veal cutlet! Sancho in such a situation once fixed upon cow-heel; 5 and his
choice, though he could not help it, is not to be disparaged. Then in the inter-
vals of pictured scenery and Shandean contemplation, 6 to catch the preparation
and the stir in the kitchen—Procul! O procul  estre profani! 7 These hours are
sacred to silence and to musing, to be treasured up in the memory, and to feed
the source of smiling thoughts hereafter. I would not waste them in idle talk; or
if I must have the integrity of fancy broken in upon, I would rather it were by
a stranger than a friend. A stranger takes his hue and character from the time
and place; he is a part of the furniture and costume of an inn. If he is a Quaker,
or from the West Riding 8 of Yorkshire, so much the better. I do not even try to
sympathize with him, and he breaks no squares. 9 I associate nothing with my
traveling companion but present objects and passing events. In his ignorance of
me and my affairs, I in a manner forget myself. But a friend reminds one of other
things, rips up old grievances, and destroys the abstraction of the scene. He
comes in ungraciously between us and our imaginary character. Something is
dropped in the course of conversation that gives a hint of your profession and
pursuits; or from having someone with you that knows the less sublime portions
of your history, it seems that other people do. You are no longer a citizen of the
world: but your “unhoused free condition is put into circumscription and con-
fine.” 10 The incognito of an inn is one of its striking privileges—“lord of oneself,

1. Charles Lamb. “Table talk”: mealtime conver-
sation.
2. Altered from 1 Henry IV III.iii.68–69.
4. A thin slice of bacon or ham.
5. The foot of a cow stewed so as to make a jelly.
6. An allusion to the seemingly random associa-
tions of ideas in the speech and thought of the
characters in Laurence Sterne’s Tristram Shandy
(1760–67).
7. “Away! away! ye unhallowed ones!” Cried out by
the priestess as she calls up Hecate, goddess of the
underworld (Virgil, Aeneid VI.258).
8. The western division.
9. I.e., doesn’t change the circumstances. (“To
break squares” meant to violate the regular order of
doing something.)
10. Shakespeare’s Othello I.ii.26–27.
uncumbered with a name,2 Oh! it is great to shake off the trammels of the world and of public opinion—to lose our importunate, tormenting, everlasting personal identity in the elements of nature, and become the creature of the moment, clear of all ties—to hold to the universe only by a dish of sweetbreads, and to owe nothing but the score3 of the evening—and no longer seeking for applause and meeting with contempt, to be known by no other title than the Gentleman in the parlor! One may take one’s choice of all characters in this romantic state of uncertainty as to one’s real pretensions, and become indefinately respectable and negatively right-worshipful. We baffle prejudice and disappoint conjecture; and from being so to others, begin to be objects of curiosity and wonder even to ourselves. We are no more those hackneyed commonplaces that we appear in the world: an inn restores us to the level of nature, and quits scores4 with society! I have certainly spent some enviable hours at inns—sometimes when I have been left entirely to myself, and have tried to solve some metaphysical problem, as once at Witham Common,5 where I found out the proof that likeness is not a case of the association of ideas—at other times, when there have been pictures in the room, as at St. Neot’s (I think it was), where I first met with Gribelin’s engravings of the Cartoons,6 into which I entered at once; and at a little inn on the borders of Wales, where there happened to be hanging some of Westall’s drawings,7 which I compared triumphantly (for a theory that I had, not for the admired artist) with the figure of a girl who had ferried me over the Severn, standing up in the boat between me and the fading twilight—at other times I might mention luxuriating in books, with a peculiar interest in this way, as I remember sitting up half the night to read Paul and Virginia,8 which I picked up at an inn at Bridge-water, after being drenched in the rain all day; and at the same place I got through two volumes of Madame D’Arblay’s Camilla.9 It was on the tenth of April, 1798, that I sat down to a volume of the New Eloise, at the inn at Llangollen,1 over a bottle of sherry and a cold chicken. The letter I chose was that in which St. Preux describes his feelings as he first caught a glimpse from the heights of the Jura of the Pays de Vaud, which I had brought with me as a bonne bouche2 to crown the evening with. It was my birthday, and I had for the first time come from a place in the neighborhood to visit this delightful spot. The road to Llangollen turns off between Chirk and Wrexham; and on passing a certain point, you come all at once upon the valley, which opens like an amphitheater, broad, barren hills rising in majestic state on either side, with “green upland swells that echo to the bleat of flocks”3 below, and the river Dee babbling over its stony bed in the midst of them. The valley at this time “glittered green with sunny showers,” and a budding ash tree dipped its tender branches in the chiding stream. How proud, how glad I was to walk

2. Dryden, To My Honored Kinsman, John Driden (1700), line 18. “Incognito”: anonymity; with one’s name undivulgéd.
3. Bill for food and drink.
4. Clears off debts.
5. In Sommersetshire.
6. Simon Gribelin (1661–1733), who made engraved copies of the cartoons (i.e., full-scale drawings) that Raphael had designed for tapestries to be hung on the walls of the Sistine Chapel, in the Vatican. “St. Neot’s”: a town in Huntingdonshire.
8. Paul et Virginie was a widely read novel of sentiment published by the French author, Bernardin de St. Pierre, in 1787.
9. Camilla, or a Picture of Youth (1796), a novel by Madame D’Arblay, whose maiden name had been Fanny Burney. A town in Wales. La Nouvelle Héloïse is a novel by Rousseau published in 1761; the hero is St. Preux. The “Jura” is a mountain range on the French-Swiss border; the “Pays de Vaud” is a canton in Switzerland.
2. A sweetmeat, eaten after a meal.
3. Coleridge, Ode to the Departing Year (1796), lines 125–26; the quotation that follows (“glittered green ● ● ●”) is from the same poem, line 124.
along the high road that commanded the delicious prospect, repeating the lines which I have just quoted from Mr. Coleridge’s poems! But besides the prospect which opened beneath my feet, another also opened to my inward sight, a heavenly vision, on which were written, in letters large as Hope could make them, these four words, Liberty, Genius, Love, Virtue; which have since faded into the light of common day, or mock my idle gaze.

The beautiful is vanished, and returns not.

Still I would return some time or other to this enchanted spot; but I would return to it alone. What other self could I find to share that influx of thoughts, of regret, and delight, the traces of which I could hardly conjure up to myself, so much have they been broken and defaced! I could stand on some tall rock, and overlook the precipice of years that separates me from what I then was. I was at that time going shortly to visit the poet whom I have above named. Where is he now? Not only I myself have changed; the world, which was then new to me, has become old and incorrigible. Yet will I turn to thee in thought, O sylvan Dee, as then thou wert, in joy, in youth and gladness; and thou shalt always be to me the river of Paradise, where I will drink of the waters of life freely.

There is hardly any thing that shows the shortsightedness or capriciousness of the imagination more than traveling does. With change of place we change our ideas; nay, our opinions and feelings. We can by an effort indeed transport ourselves to old and long-forgotten scenes, and then the picture of the mind revives again; but we forget those that we have just left. It seems that we can think but of one place at a time. The canvas of the fancy has only a certain extent, and if we paint one set of objects upon it, they immediately efface every other. We cannot enlarge our conceptions; we only shift our point of view. The landscape bares its bosom to the enraptured eye; we take our fill of it; and seem as if we could form no other image of beauty or grandeur. We pass on, and think no more of it: the horizon that shuts it from our sight also blots it from our memory like a dream. In traveling through a wild barren country, I can form no idea of a woody and cultivated one. It appears to me that all the world must be barren, like what I see of it. In the country we forget the town, and in town we despise the country. “Beyond Hyde Park,” says Sir Fopling Flutter, “all is a desert.” All that part of the map that we do not see before us is a blank. The world in our conceit of it is not much bigger than a nutshell. It is not one prospect expanded into another, county joined to county; kingdom to kingdom, lands to seas, making an image voluminous and vast—the mind can form no larger idea of space than the eye can take in at a single glance. The rest is a name written on a map, a calculation of arithmetic. For instance, what is the true signification of that immense mass of territory and population, known by the name of China to us? An inch of paste-board on a wooden globe, of no more account than a China orange! Things near us are seen of the size of life: things at a distance are diminished to the size of the understanding. We measure the universe by ourselves, and even comprehend the texture of our own being only piecemeal. In this way, however, we remember an infinity of things and places. The mind is like a mechanical instrument that

4. From Coleridge’s translation of Schiller’s drama, The Death of Wallenstein (1799–1800), V.i.68. “Faded into the light of common day” is a reminiscence of Wordsworth’s Ode: Intimations of Immortality, line 77.

5. See the description of the Garden of Eden, Genesis 2:8–10.

6. A reminiscence of Wordsworth’s Tintern Abbey, line 61.

7. The line is in fact spoken by Harriet, the heroine of George Etheredge’s Restoration comedy, The Man of Mode, or Sir Fopling Flutter (1676), V.ii. Hyde Park, in London, was favored by people of fashion.
plays a great variety of tunes, but it must play them in succession. One idea recalls another, but it at the same time excludes all others. In trying to renew old recollections, we cannot as it were unfold the whole web of our existence; we must pick out the single threads. So in coming to a place where we have formerly lived and with which we have intimate associations, everyone must have found that the feeling grows more vivid the nearer we approach the spot, from the mere anticipation of the actual impression: we remember circumstances, feelings, persons, faces, names, that we had not thought of for years; but for the time all the rest of the world is forgotten!—To return to the question I have quitted above.

I have no objection to go to see ruins, aqueducts, pictures, in company with a friend or a party, but rather the contrary, for the former reason reversed. They are intelligible matters, and will bear talking about. The sentiment here is not tacit, but communicable and overt. Salisbury Plain is barren of criticism, but Stonehenge will bear a discussion antiquarian, picturesque, and philosophical. In setting out on a party of pleasure, the first consideration always is where we shall go: in taking a solitary ramble, the question is what we shall meet with by the way. “The mind then is its own place”; nor are we anxious to arrive at the end of our journey. I can myself do the honors indifferently well to works of art and curiosity. I once took a party to Oxford with no mean éclat—showed them the seat of the Muses at a distance,

With glistering spires and pinnacles adorned—
descanted on the learned air that breathes from the grassy quadrangles and stone walls of halls and colleges—was at home in the Bodleian; and at Blenheim quite superseded the powdered Ciceroni that attended us, and that pointed in vain with his wand to commonplace beauties in matchless pictures.—As another exception to the above reasoning, I should not feel confident in venturing on a journey in a foreign country without a companion. I should want at intervals to hear the sound of my own language. There is an involuntary antipathy in the mind of an Englishman to foreign manners and notions that requires the assistance of social sympathy to carry it off. As the distance from home increases, this relief, which was at first a luxury, becomes a passion and an appetite. A person would almost feel stifled to find himself in the deserts of Arabia without friends and countrymen: there must be allowed to be something in the view of Athens or old Rome that claims the utterance of speech; and I own that the Pyramids are too mighty for any single contemplation. In such situations, so opposite to all one's ordinary train of ideas, one seems a species by oneself, a limb torn off from society, unless one can meet with instant fellowship and support.—Yet I did not feel this want or craving very pressing once, when I first set my foot on the laughing shores of France. Calais was peopled with novelty and delight. The confused, busy murmur of the place was like oil and wine poured into my ears; nor did the mariners' hymn, which was sung from the top of an old crazy vessel in the harbor, as the sun went down, send an alien sound into my soul. I breathed the air of general humanity. I walked over “the vine-covered hills and gay regions of France,”

8. The prehistoric circle of huge upright slabs of stone, on Salisbury Plain.
3. From William Roscoe's *Song Written for the Anniversary of 14th August, 1791*. Hazlitt had visited France in 1802–3 in order to make copies of paintings in the Louvre.
erect and satisfied; for the image of man was not cast down and chained to the foot of arbitrary thrones. I was at no loss for language, for that of all the great schools of painting was open to me. The whole is vanished like a shade. Pictures, heroes, glory, freedom, all are fled: nothing remains but the Bourbons⁴ and the French people!—There is undoubtedly a sensation in traveling into foreign parts that is to be had nowhere else: but it is more pleasing at the time than lasting. It is too remote from our habitual associations to be a common topic of discourse or reference, and, like a dream or another state of existence, does not piece into our daily modes of life. It is an animated but a momentary hallucination. It demands an effort to exchange our actual for our ideal identity; and to feel the pulse of our old transports revive very keenly, we must “jump”⁵ all our present comforts and connexions. Our romantic and itinerant character is not to be domesticated. Dr. Johnson remarked how little foreign travel added to the facilities of conversation in those who had been abroad.⁶ In fact, the time we have spent there is both delightful and in one sense instructive; but it appears to be cut out of our substantial, downright existence, and never to join kindly on to it. We are not the same, but another, and perhaps more enviable individual, all the time we are out of our own country. We are lost to ourselves, as well as to our friends. So the poet somewhat quaintly sings,

Out of my country and myself I go.

Those who wish to forget painful thoughts, do well to absent themselves for a while from the ties and objects that recall them: but we can be said only to fulfill our destiny in the place that gave us birth. I should on this account like well enough to spend the whole of my life in traveling abroad, if I could any where borrow another life to spend afterwards at home!

1822, 1825

From Mr. Wordsworth¹

Mr. Wordsworth’s genius is a pure emanation of the Spirit of the Age. Had he lived in any other period of the world, he would never have been heard of. As it is, he has some difficulty to contend with the hebetude² of his intellect, and the meanness of his subject. With him “lowliness is young ambition’s ladder”:³ but he finds it a toil to climb in this way the steep of Fame. His homely Muse can hardly raise her wing from the ground, nor spread her hidden glories to the sun. He has “no figures nor no fantasies, which busy passion draws in the brains of men”:⁴ neither the gorgeous machinery of mythologic lore, nor the splendid colors of poetic diction. His style is vernacular: he delivers household truths. He

---

4. The French royal family, which had been deposed during the Revolution, was restored in 1814 after the fall of Napoleon.
5. Abandon, leave behind.
6. In Boswell’s Life of Johnson, entry for May 13, 1778.
1. This is one of a series of essays on contemporary philosophers, poets, and statesmen that Hazlitt published in 1825 with the title The Spirit of the Age: or Contemporary Portraits. In this essay Hazlitt deals with Wordsworth’s Lyrical Ballads and other early poems. With notable insight Hazlitt, alone among contemporary critics, writes a sociological study of Wordsworth’s innovations in poetry and criticism. He recognizes that the traditional hierarchy of poetic genres, subjects, and diction had reflected the class-structure of society, and that by “leveling” this hierarchy Wordsworth had effected a literary equivalent of the political and social revolution in France.
2. Dullness, lethargy.
3. Spoken by Brutus in Julius Caesar 2.1.22.
4. Julius Caesar 2.1.231–32; Hazlitt substitutes “passion” for Brutus’s word “care.”
sees nothing loftier than human hopes; nothing deeper than the human heart. This he probes, this he tampers with, this he poises, with all its incalculable weight of thought and feeling, in his hands; and at the same time calms the throbbing pulses of his own heart, by keeping his eye ever fixed on the face of nature. If he can make the lifeblood flow from the wounded breast, this is the living coloring with which he paints his verse: if he can assuage the pain or close up the wound with the balm of solitary musing, or the healing power of plants and herbs and “skyey influences,” this is the sole triumph of his art. He takes the simplest elements of nature and of the human mind, the mere abstract conditions inseparable from our being, and tries to compound a new system of poetry from them; and has perhaps succeeded as well as any one could. “Nihil humani a me alienum puto” is the motto of his works. He thinks nothing low or indifferent of which this can be affirmed: every thing that professes to be more than this, that is not an absolute essence of truth and feeling, he holds to be vitiating, false, and spurious. In a word, his poetry is founded on setting up an opposition (and pushing it to the utmost length) between the natural and the artificial; between the spirit of humanity, and the spirit of fashion and of the world!

It is one of the innovations of the time. It partakes of, and is carried along with, the revolutionary movement of our age: the political changes of the day were the model on which he formed and conducted his poetical experiments. His Muse (it cannot be denied, and without this we cannot explain its character at all) is a leveling one. It proceeds on a principle of equality, and strives to reduce all things to the same standard. It is distinguished by a proud humility. It relies upon its own resources, and disdains external show and relief. It takes the commonest events and objects, as a test to prove that nature is always interesting from its inherent truth and beauty, without any of the ornaments of dress or pomp of circumstances to set it off. Hence the unaccountable mixture of seeming simplicity and real abstruseness in the Lyrical Ballads. Fools have laughed at, wise men scarcely understand them. He takes a subject or a story merely as pegs or loops to hang thought and feeling on; the incidents are trifling, in proportion to his contempt for imposing appearances; the reflections are profound, according to the gravity and the aspiring pretensions of his mind.

His popular, inartificial style gets rid (at a blow) of all the trappings of verse, of all the high places of poetry: “the cloud-capped towers, the solemn temples, the gorgeous palaces,” are swept to the ground, and “like the baseless fabric of a vision, leave not a wreck behind.” All the traditions of learning, all the superstitions of age, are obliterated and effaced. We begin de novo, on a tabula rasa of poetry. The purple pall, the nodding plume of tragedy are exploded as mere pantomime and trick, to return to the simplicity of truth and nature. Kings, queens, priests, nobles, the altar and the throne, the distinctions of rank, birth, wealth, power, “the judge’s robe, the marshal’s truncheon, the ceremony that to great ones ‘longs,” are not to be found here. The author tramples on the pride of art with greater pride. The Ode and Epode, the Strophe and the Antistrophe, he laughs to scorn. The harp of Homer, the trump of Pindar and of Alcaeus are still. The decencies of costume, the decorations of vanity are stripped off without mercy as barbarous, idle, and Gothic. The jewels in the

5. Measure for Measure 3.1.9.
6. Terence, Roman writer of comedy: “Nothing that is human do I consider alien to me.”
7. Adapted from Prospero’s speech in The Tempest 4.1.151–56.
8. We begin anew, on a clean slate.
9. Adapted from Measure for Measure 2.2.59–61.
1. Pindar and Alcaeus were Greek writers of odes.
2. I.e., uncouth; belonging to the Dark Ages.
crisped hair,\(^3\) the diadem on the polished brow are thought meretricious, theatrical, vulgar; and nothing contents his fastidious taste beyond a simple garland of flowers. Neither does he avail himself of the advantages which nature or accident holds out to him. He chooses to have his subject a foil to his invention, to owe nothing but to himself. He gathers manna in the wilderness, he strikes the barren rock for the gushing moisture. He elevates the mean by the strength of his own aspirations; he clothes the naked with beauty and grandeur from the stores of his own recollections. No cypress grove loads his verse with funeral pomp: but his imagination lends “a sense of joy”

To the bare trees and mountains bare,  
And grass in the green field.\(^4\)

No storm, no shipwreck startles us by its horrors: but the rainbow lifts its head in the cloud, and the breeze sighs through the withered fern. No sad vicissitude of fate, no overwhelming catastrophe in nature deforms his page: but the dewdrop glitters on the bending flower, the tear collects in the glistening eye.

Beneath the hills, along the flowery vales,  
The generations are prepared; the pangs,  
The internal pangs are ready; the dread strife  
Of poor humanity’s afflicted will,  
Struggling in vain with ruthless destiny.\(^5\)

As the lark ascends from its low bed on fluttering wing, and salutes the morning skies; so Mr. Wordsworth’s unpretending Muse, in russet\(^6\) guise, scales the summits of reflection, while it makes the round earth its foot-stool, and its home!

Possibly a good deal of this may be regarded as the effect of disappointed views and an inverted ambition. Prevented by native pride and indolence from climbing the ascent of learning or greatness, taught by political opinions to say to the vain pomp and glory of the world, “I hate ye,”\(^7\) seeing the path of classical and artificial poetry blocked up by the cumbrous ornaments of style and turgid commonplaces, so that nothing more could be achieved in that direction but by the most ridiculous bombast or the tamest servility; he has turned back partly from the bias of his mind, partly perhaps from a judicious policy—has struck into the sequestered vale of humble life, sought out the Muse among sheepcotes and hamlets and the peasant’s mountain-haunts, has discarded all the tinsel pageantry of verse, and endeavored (not in vain) to aggrandize the trivial and add the charm of novelty to the familiar. No one has shown the same imagination in raising trifles into importance: no one has displayed the same pathos in treating of the simplest feelings of the heart. Reserved, yet haughty, having no unruly or violent passions (or those passions having been early suppressed), Mr. Wordsworth has passed his life in solitary musing, or in daily converse with the face of nature. He exemplifies in an eminent degree the power of association; for this poetry has no other source or character. He has dwelt among pastoral scenes, till each object has become connected with a thousand feelings, a link in the chain of thought, a fiber of his own heart. Everyone is by

---

5. Wordsworth, *The Excursion* 6.53ff. The first line is misquoted: “Amid the groves, under the shadowy hills. . . .”
6. A coarse homespun cloth, worn by country people.
7. Shakespeare and John Fletcher, *King Henry the Eighth* 3.2.365: “Vain pomp and glory of this world, I hate ye!”
habit and familiarity strongly attached to the place of his birth, or to objects that recall the most pleasing and eventful circumstances of his life. But to the author of the *Lyrical Ballads*, nature is a kind of home; and he may be said to take a personal interest in the universe. There is no image so insignificant that it has not in some mood or other found the way into his heart: no sound that does not awaken the memory of other years.—

To him the meanest flower that blows can give
Thoughts that do often lie too deep for tears.⁸

The daisy looks up to him with sparkling eye as an old acquaintance: the cuckoo haunts him with sounds of early youth not to be expressed: a linnet’s nest startles him with boyish delight: an old withered thorn is weighed down with a heap of recollections: a grey cloak, seen on some wild moor, torn by the wind, or drenched in the rain, afterwards becomes an object of imagination to him: even the lichens on the rock have a life and being in his thoughts. He has described all these objects in a way and with an intensity of feeling that no one else had done before him, and has given a new view or aspect of nature. He is in this sense the most original poet now living, and the one whose writings could the least be spared for they have no substitute elsewhere. The vulgar do not read them, the learned, who see all things through books, do not understand them, the great despise, the fashionable may ridicule them: but the author has created himself an interest in the heart of the retired and lonely student of nature, which can never die. Persons of this class will still continue to feel what he has felt: he has expressed what they might in vain wish to express, except with glistening eye and faltering tongue! There’s a lofty philosophic tone, a thoughtful humanity, infused into his pastoral vein. Remote from the passions and events of the great world, he has communicated interest and dignity to the primal movements of the heart of man, and ingrafted his own conscious reflections on the casual thoughts of hinds and shepherds. Nursed amidst the grandeur of mountain scenery, he has stooped to have a nearer view of the daisy under his feet, or plucked a branch of white-thorn from the spray: but in describing it, his mind seems imbued with the majesty and solemnity of the objects around him—the tall rock lifts its head in the erectness of his spirit; the cataract roars in the sound of his verse; and in its dim and mysterious meaning, the mists seem to gather in the hollows of Helvellyn, and the forked Skiddaw⁹ hovers in the distance. There is little mention of mountainous scenery in Mr. Wordsworth’s poetry; but by internal evidence one might be almost sure that it was written in a mountainous country, from its bareness, its simplicity, its loftiness and its depth!

* * *

1825

---

⁸ Adapted from the conclusion of Wordsworth’s *Ode: Intimations of Immortality.*
⁹ Mountains in the Lake District.