

## ON THE LOVE OF THE COUNTRY

William Hazlitt was one of the leading prose writers of the Romantic period. Influenced by the concise social commentary in Joseph Addison's eighteenth-century magazine, the *Spectator*, and by the personal tone of the essays of Michel de Montaigne, Hazlitt was one of the most celebrated practitioners of the "familiar" essay. Characterized by conversational diction and personal opinion on topics ranging from English poets to washerwomen, the style of Hazlitt's critical and autobiographical writings has greatly influenced methods of modern writing on aesthetics. His literary criticism, particularly on the Lake poets, has also provided readers with a lens through which to view the work of his Romantic contemporaries.

**Hazlitt was the son of a Unitarian minister. After a brief stay at America he returned to England where his literary genius ultimately flowered. Coleridge influenced his mind and art to a great extent. From 1814 till his death he contributed to the Edinburgh Review, The Examiner, The Times and The London Magazine. His well known essays were collected in the Round Table, Table Talk or Original Essays on Men and Manners and The Spirit of the Age or Contemporary Portraits. By his bold and radical views, Hazlitt attracted a lot of attention and criticism. But he always wrote undaunted. He was a keen observer of life. His sharp memory remembered the past incidents with astonishing vividness and detail. He was eager to inquire into human life with all its variety. Thus he wrote on a vast range of topics. His essay deals with the world of men and women. It records their action, assigns their motives and exhibits their whims. He writes on books of all kinds, politics, sports, stage etc.**

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**Hazlitt puts his ideas in an informal manner. But it is not Lamb's informality. Hazlitt's informality depends upon systematic enquiry into the topic. Hazlitt is more interested in ideas than form. A large number of his essays are on abstract ideas such as Egotism, Reason, Imagination, the Fear of Death etc. A leading idea is talked**

about. Thus new ideas are brought forward. This was the underlying practice in the two collections of essay 'The Round Table' and 'Table Talk'. But Hazlitt does not indulge in moralizing. According to critics he is rather a moral historian than a moral philosopher. Hazlitt has conveyed his enjoyment and observation through his essays. Whatever the theme of his essays, each of them is a reflection on human nature. They are the reflections of a man who lived and loved life. With penetrating sympathy and feelings, Hazlitt observes life. The reflection that we find in Hazlitt's essays are not the products of head, but come straight from the heart. His personal prejudices often vitiate his judgement.

Hazlitt belongs to the group of personal essayist. In his hand essay became a means of self expression. He puts himself in the centre whatever be the topic of the essay. He often glides into the past. He weaves the texture of his essays by the threads of memory. He, thus, reveals his life and mind. He is passionately alive to men and matters around him in the present. If he finds foible and frailties in them, he ridicules them. His writings are thus also employed for exposing the follies of the society and human life in general.

Hazlitt's "On the Love of Life" was first published in the *The Examiner*, Jan. 15, 1815 and was one of the essays picked to go into his first book, *The Round Table (1815-17)*. Originally *The Round Table* was a book, a collection of essays that had been published in the *Examiner* (edited by Leigh Hunt). The essays were written by a variety of people, quite a few by Hunt. The first edition of the book, consisting of two volumes, came out in 1817. My volume of *The Round Table (London: Sampson Low, Son, & Marston, 1869)* pretty much only contains essays written by Hazlitt, the editors having considered the rest to be "both inferior and dissimilar to him."

#### Questions

1. Hazlitt's outlook on Nature.
2. Importance of Nature in human life.
3. Hazlitt's relationship with Nature.