

Liberal Sprinkling of WIT, Satire and Irony in the Essays of W. Hazlitt

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Abstract

The admixture of wit and satire in his essays made W. Hazlitt is one of the greatest essayists of the English language. A study of this paper would enable to know that Hazlitt's satire is not genial and catholic Hazlitt had his own views on satire and wit. Hazlitt satirized the 'learned persons' in his essays. He satirized people with one idea. He satirized Critics. He was also endowed with Irony. Hazlitt has given us many witticisms. Hazlitt's comments on his contemporaries are satirical. Hazlitt makes in his naturally his essays provide wonderfully delightful reading. William Hazlitt's writing was characterized by remarkable clarity, ensuring that even complex ideas were easily comprehensible to readers. Moreover, his prose style emanated a passionate tone, reflecting his deep emotional engagement with his subjects and conveying an intense enthusiasm and conviction. By incorporating personal anecdotes and experiences, he added a personal touch that forged an intimate connection with readers. His writing also showcased a keen sense of wit and irony, employing clever wordplay and subtle humor to engage and entertain his audience. Hazlitt's exploration of human nature exhibited remarkable depth of thought, delving into complex emotions, motivations, and psychological nuances. With an independent voice, he fearlessly expressed his opinions, challenging conventional wisdom and offering unique perspectives. Employing rhetorical flourishes, such as parallelism, repetition, and antithesis, Hazlitt heightened the rhetorical impact of his writing. Finally, through his passionate and emotive language, he appealed to readers' emotions, evoking empathy and fostering a profound connection with his ideas.

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Introduction

Hazlitt stands in the front rank of English essayists. It is not because of the autobiographical element in the essays that Hazlitt reigns supreme, it is because of the input of wit and satire that Hazlitt makes in his Naturally his essays provide wonderfully delightful reading. He is highly ironical mainly because he was swayed by intense prejudices and antipathies. This is the reason why we cannot come across the genial humor and catholicity of spirit that we encounter in Chaucer and Lamb. The tone of his essays is akin to that of Jonathan Swift. Hazlitt had the temperamental bitterness of a romanticist. This bitterness robs his essays of the sunny side of humour, which we encounter in other romantic essayists, mainly Lamb, Hazlitt on Humour and Satire Many a time while discussing a critical work or a playwright, Hazlitt moves to the consideration of some abstract literary quality.

Objectives

- To explore the element of wit, satire and irony in the essays of William Hazlitt.
- To understand the fact that Hazlitt was highly satirical because he was swayed by intense prejudices.
- To know the fact that how Hazlitt used satire as a corrective to the follies of mankind.
- To study on liberal sprinkling of wit, satire and irony in the essays of Hazlitt.

Research Methodology

The research is based on the secondary data collected through various resources like journals, books, and web sites. The objective of this paper is to explore the element of wit, satire and irony in the essays of William Hazlitt.

Hazlitt Defines Humour

In the section "On Wit and Humour" he says. "Humour is the describing the ludicrous as it is in itself, wit is the exposing it, by comparing and contrasting it as with something else. Humour is, as it were, the growth of nature and accident; wit is the product of art and fancy." The main element that gives vitality to his remarks is his capacity to provide anecdotes and illustrations to prove his point. For example, illustrating the relationship between tears and laughter, Hazlitt produces lively examples of the way children respond to different kinds of surprises in games of hide-and-seek or blind man's bluff, or when a masked face is pressed to theirs. The effect of contrast and seeming absurdity is revealed in vivid examples: "We laugh at the dress of foreigners and them at ours. Three chimney-sweepers meeting three Chinese in Lincoln's-Inn Fields, they laughed at one another until they were ready to drop down." Hazlitt was of the definite opinion that wit most often produces its effect by comparison. "On this principle "demonstrating the equality of the three angles of a right-angled triangle to two right ones" must be a fine example of wit. But he maintained that wit is something inferior to imagination.

Hazlitt's Satire Against Bookish Persons

Hazlitt was against Defining learning, Hazlitt says, "Learning is the knowledge of that which learned men" Hazlitt remarks; He is the most learned man who knows none but the learned know." Continuing his diatribe against the so-called the most of what is farthest removed from common life and actual observation, that is of the least practical utility, and least liable to be brought to the test of experience, and that, having been handed down through the greatest number of intermediate stages, is the most full of uncertainty, difficulties and contradictions. AYS Though a learned man may be conversant with the exact dimensions of Constantinople and Pekin, "he can hardly find his way into the next street." Then, though he can give a pompous lecture on all the principal characters in history, "he does not know whether his oldest acquaintance is a knave or a fool." Such a learned may be a professed master of the laws of optics, yet unfortunately "he cannot tell whether an object is black or white, round or square." A learned man, Hazlitt says, may be an "expert in all the dead and most of the living languages, yet "he can neither speak his own fluently, nor write it correctly." To cap his diatribe against such learned persons Hazlitt remarks a mere scholar, who knows nothing but books, must be ignorant even of them. Books do not teach the use of books'....The learned pedant is conversant with books only as they are made of other books and those again of others, without end." Finally, he avers that learned men are usually devoid of common sense, "Above all, the mass of society have common sense, which the learned in all ages want. Satire in On People with One Idea' Hazlitt says that the people with one idea are bores simply because they would expatiate on that particular idea. He says that such people with one idea "bore you to death with some one idea. Then he provides examples of many people with one idea. For example, he says if a person is remarkable for living on a vegetable diet, he "never fails to entertain you all dinner-time with an invective against animal food." Then he talks about one doctor Abernethy who thinks his pill to be a cure of all diseases and disorders. Hazlitt says, "A person once complaining to his physician that he thought his mode of treatment had not answered, he assured him it was the best in the world,-and as a proof of if, says he, I have had one gentleman, a patient of your disorder, under the same

regimen for the last Sixteen years !" It must be remembered that doctors have always been the oldest comic figures. In popular English literature doctors have been butts of ridicule, one has only to look at Chaucer and his Doctor of Physic.

Satire in "On People with One Idea"

Hazlitt, come to fatal ends. "How many projectors have gone mad in good earnest from incessantly harping on one idea: the discovery of the philosopher's stone, the finding of the longitude, or paying off the national debt! This disorder, at length come to fatal crisis; but long before this, and while they were walking about and talking a usual, the derangement of the fancy, the loss of all voluntary power to control or alienate their ideas from the single subject that occupies them, was gradually taking place and overturning the fabric of understanding by wrenching it all to one side." As examples of this malady he speaks of Alderman Wood who "talked of nothing but the Queen in all companies for the last six months," Among such people with one idea, Hazlitt includes a person who will speak only on verbs, another who will talk on the beauties of short hand, while a third one would expatiate on the method for prevention the counterfeiting of bank-notes.

Hazlitt's Satire Against Critic

Hazlitt was one of those critics who did not look kindly at 'critics He maintained that in an age when the taste of the reading public has become vitiated, critics could make or ruin reputations. A critic, Hazlitt says, "does nothing nowadays who does not try to torture the most obvious expression into a thousand meanings and enter into a circuitous explanation of all that can be urged for or against its being in the best or the worst style possible." Hazlitt says that a modern critic cares more for his own show of learning than doing justice to the author under scanner: "His object indeed is not to do justice to the author, whom he treats with very little ceremony, but to do himself homage, and to show his acquaintance with all the topics and resources of criticism." Some of these critics are nothing but pedants, who judge writers by their obsolete standards of correctness' and decorum and treat a poem as a "piece of formal architecture. "With a few other critics it is "not the question of literary discussion, but of political proscription." Some are antiquarians, pure and simple, a few others are antiquarians; still a few others are snobs who "discern no beauties but what are concealed from superficial eyes and overlook all that are obvious to the vulgar part of mankind." Hazlitt also speaks of a breed of critics whom he named "word-catchers." They are fellows that pick out a word in a sentence and a sentence in a volume and tell you it is wrong. These erudite persons constantly find out by anticipation that you are deficient in the smallest things-hat you cannot spell certain words or join the nominative case and the verb together, because to do this is the height of their own ambition, and of course they must set you down lower than their opinion of themselves," Hazlitt was of the opinion that nearly all the modern critics are bad, as they forget that a disciplined self-effacement is the critic's first requirement. and that his purpose is "rather to direct attention to objects of taste, than to dictate to it." It became disastrous when learning, pride and self-assertion the critic in competition with the author, Hazlitt said, for it means that stead of reviewers catching poets, poets watch reviewers, who dares to show "the colors, the light and shade, the soul and body of a work," when "literary jealousy and littleness are still the motive, politics the pretext and blackguardism the mode of most contemporary criticism.

Hazlitt's Irony

Hazlitt was also a master of irony and sarcasm and this mastery Developed through his acute powers of observation, He gives a curious Definition of respectability, which is highly witty: "It is a common maxim with me that stage-coaches and consequently stage-coachmen are respectable in proportion to the distance they have to travel. "His remarks about Leigh Hunt, as they appear in the essay "The Indian Jugglers" are also highly ironical :"Hunt is too versatile for a professional man and not dull enough for a political drudge, too gay to be happy, too thoughtless to be rich. He wants the enthusiasm of a poet, the severity of a prose writer and the application of a man of business."

Hazlitt's Witticisms

Even a cursory glance at the essays of Hazlitt would give the readers an idea that he was a very witty man and his witticisms lie scattered in almost every essay. Hazlitt has provided us with a host of definitions, which are full of wit, wisdom and irony.

Here are a Few Examples of Hazlit's Witticisms

- i) A wise traveller never despises his own country.
- ii) A hair in the head is worth two in the brush.
- iii) A scholar is like a book written in a dead language. It is not everyone that can read in it.
- iv) The more we do, the more we can do.
- v) The busier we are the more leisure we have.
- vi) Wit is the salt of conversation, not the food.
- vii) Though familiarity may not breed contempt, it takes off the edge of admiration.
- viii) Prejudice is the child of ignorant
- ix) To be happy, we must be true to nature and carry our age along with us.
- x) Man is the only animal that laughs and weeps; for he is the only animal that is struck with the difference between what things are, and what they ought to be.
- xi) Fashion is the abortive issue of a vain ostentation and exclusive egotism: it is haughty, trifling. Affected, servile, and ambitious, precise and fantastical, all in a breath-tied
- xii) Modesty is the lowest of virtues and is a real deficiency it indicates, He who undervalues undervalued by others. Rule, and bound to conform to every whim of the minute despotic, mean greatest of cowards for it is afraid of itself.
- xiii) There is no meaner, stupid, dastardly, pitiful, selfish, spiteful, envious, ungrateful animal than the Public. 1 It is the confession of the himself is justly
- xiv) Some person make promises for the pleasure of breaking then manner of doing it.
- xv) We never do anything well till we cease to think about the Hazlitt's Comments on his Contemporaries

Conclusion

In the end we can say that in this research paper, we find a liberal sprinkling of wit, humour and satire that no other contemporary essayist comes near him in this field. It is these elements, which enliven Hazlitt's style and make his essays worth reading Hazlitt strength in the realm of satire is so superb that no other contemporary essayist comes near him in this field.

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