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Liber Amoris and the Lineaments of Hazlitt's Desire

> If soon she be not made a wife,
> Her honour's singed, and then for life,
> She's--what I dare not name.
> --John Gay, *The Beggar's Opera* (2611)

At four o'clock on Wednesday, July 17, 1822, Sarah Hazlitt called on 10 George Street, where her husband William stayed during the couple's divorce proceedings in Edinburgh. Although the court would not issue the Divorce Decree until August 2 (Houck 119), Sarah Hazlitt's role in the divorce had finished that Wednesday, and while she drank tea and William dined, the newly-unweds had a remarkable conversation, which Sarah Hazlitt recorded in her journal. William wanted a divorce so he could be free to marry Sarah Walker--the daughter of the family that managed the lodging-house where William had lived in London since August 1820. So it may have been inevitable that William's talk turned to this other Sarah, with whom he was obsessed. But what's remarkable about this conversation is how candidly she reports him speaking of the Walker family's conduct--and of his own:

> He said that the mother [Mrs. Walker, his London landlady] was the most disgusting, vulgar old wretch that could be and corrupted her children's minds by her bawdy indecent conversation. Though he had never heard an improper or indelicate word from the girl [Sarah] yet it had often struck him, that they had never objected to the girls of the town coming up to him continually, and that Sarah would often send them up when her mother had said he was not at home, for which they praised her and said she was a nice girl. I told him it showed what the house and the people were well enough. (247)

Sarah Hazlitt seems to have been too smart a woman not to make that last remark without ironically including her husband among "the people" in that "house." A woman candid enough to discuss her own extramarital "intrigues" (245), Sarah Hazlitt also told William that she thought Sarah Walker "as thin and bony as the scrag end of a neck of mutton" (247). This unromantic image may have been a common figure of speech at the time, but Sarah Hazlitt may also have alluded to "the only love letter from Hazlitt to his first wife that has survived" (Sikes et al. qtd. in Hazlitt, *Letters* 103). In January of 1808, William wrote to Sarah (then Miss Stoddart): "I never love you so well as when I think of sitting down with you to dinner over a boiled scrag-end of mutton and hot potatoes" (104). Sarah Hazlitt does not record whether she intended (or William recognized) the allusion, but it's tempting to read her remark as a coda to their marriage on its last day.

As a way to introduce a discussion of *Liber Amoris*, the libelous mortification of Sarah Walker that William Hazlitt published in 1823, this salacious crumb from Sarah Hazlitt's diary lends irony to the sexist vein in Romantic ideology (Ross 1) through which generations of reviewers, critics and biographers have tended, for the most part, to take the word of a self-confessed john on the character of Walker. If Walker was even remotely the "religious" woman (*Liber Amoris* 161) Hazlitt said she was, a parade of prostitutes through the family household--as much as the volatility of Hazlitt's obsession--might have given her pause to think twice about his marriage proposal.

In "Sexual Politics and Literary History," Sonia Hofkosh observes that "[w]e do not have the girl's story," whether the story is Walker's, or that of the Keswick villager whom Hazlitt assaulted in 1803. This historical silence "provides the pattern for the displacement of sexual politics from the discourse of literary history generally" (132). Hofkosh supplements the silence of these two girls with a reading of Sarah Hazlitt's journal, not to speak for the others but to provide "another side to a familiar story" (133). However, like all the historical documents considered here, Sarah Hazlitt's journal is a compromised text, mediated for our reading by an editor who has been meticulously criticized for perpetrating textual errors (see Jones, "Hazlitt's Journal"). In this context, Sarah Hazlitt's diary reminds us of the tension between representation and the real, fiction and history--the tension "between desire and fulfillment, between perpetration and recollection" that Jacques Derrida calls "the logic of the hymen [...] the consummation of differends" ("Double Session" 212).

This logic or "law of the hymen" (242) between literature and truth governs the legacy of critical responses to *Liber Amoris* and propels this essay to identify Hazlitt's traffic with prostitution not as a marginal, unmentionable detail in his portrait of the artist as an abject stalker, but as a "dangerous supplement" (Derrida, *Grammatology* 151) that conditions three related problematics: Hazlitt's vexed relationship to the English literary canon and market; his self-censoring composition of *Liber Amoris*; and the aforementioned Romantic ideology whereby the critical reception of *Liber Amoris* has tended, with a few notable exceptions, to accept Hazlitt's whorish characterization of Walker--thus consigning her to a purgatorial defamation that began with the "book of love" aptly synopsized by Tom Paulin as "emotional pornography" (45).

A preliminary note about method is in order at this point, for to articulate moral objection in a critique of Hazlitt's *Liber Amoris* is to risk "following *John Bull*'s example"--which is what Duncan Wu accuses "those who base their opinion of Hazlitt on a prior moral judgment" of doing ("Sexual" 201). In the June, 1823, issues of *John Bull*, a Tory periodical edited by Theodore Hook and published by Edward Shackell (who also published the *Literary Register* that had ridiculed Hazlitt's obsession with "his landlord's daughter" a full year before *Liber Amoris* appeared [Wu, "Defence" 22-3]), the "heroine of the *Liber Amoris*"--namely, Walker--was described, "from all the reports we are able to collect, [as] 'a very pretty innocent girl, of 17 or 18 years of age'" (188). *John Bull*'s description of the "virtuous female calumniated" by the "cockney lecturer on Shakespeare" as "no better than '*a tradesman's* *daughter*'" (198) emphasizes clichés of class and gender that continue to inform the sensationalistic kind of reportage with which today's newspapers and tabloids so often, and perversely, eroticize the female victims of assault or murder (Davey 133-4).

To avoid the risk of "following *John Bull*'s example," the least we can do is to specify that this reading take a feminist approach, rather than an ostensibly chivalrous one. We can also acknowledge the perhaps inevitable complicity between textual and corporeal exploitations whereby one can broach the question of prostitution. Discussing the double standard applied to the high and low pleasures of the imagination, Bradford Mudge remarks, "the lady is still a whore, the artist still a pimp, the viewer [here, the reader] still a john" (236). In light of the connections established by Mudge between the discourses of prostitution and pornography in the British literature of the period studied here, a feminist reading of *Liber Amoris*--particularly one that focuses on its traffic with prostitution--must ultimately remain wary of its particular vulnerability to prurient misreading; as Susanne Kappeler reflects with grim irony, "conjoining feminism and pornography enhances the appeal of pornography" (19).

Tricks of the Trade

Hazlitt's relation to the English literary canon has been a matter for debate since his own time. "One of the very greatest masters of English prose," laments Paulin, "Hazlitt is almost never read or cited or studied" (1); conversely, in a recent biography of Hazlitt, A. C. Grayling declares, "his reputation [...] has never ceased to grow" (ix). Whereas Paulin leaves open to interpretation why "Hazlitt is so tenuously lodged in the cultural memory at present" (13), Grayling specifies that Hazlitt's problems with cultural capital involve what Patrick Holland has called the essayist's "libidinal libertinism" (qtd. in McCutcheon, "*Liber Amoris*").

For Grayling, *Liber Amoris* leads a host of writings, anecdotes and activities that earned for Hazlitt "the reputation in his own lifetime and for a century afterwards of being obscene; which is the chief reason why recognition of his stature in English letters was once so equivocal" (370 n.11). Writing that "Hazlitt never made a secret of his interest in sex, nor of his employing the services of prostitutes" (86), Grayling's attentive adumbration of Hazlitt's "regular liaisons" (87) with prostitutes makes the bafflement expressed by an earlier Hazlitt biographer, Ralph Wardle, seem like naïveté or obfuscation. Contemplating Coleridge's damning remark that Hazlitt was "addicted to women, as objects of sexual Indulgence" (qtd. in Grayling 86), Wardle wonders: "What had happened to prompt that final charge?" His own answer echoes the "Victorian delicacy" that for Grayling occluded Hazlitt's reputation: "A normal man of twenty-five--even a shy one--is bound to feel sexual compulsions which, if stifled, may erupt in strange ways" (78).

Perhaps "strange ways" encodes a euphemism for having one's way with strangers. The Edinburgh court records of the Hazlitt divorce offer abundant evidence to substantiate Coleridge's comment that Hazlitt was "addicted to women":

> That these carnal and adulterous intercourses were held and committed, according to the information given to the Complainer, in The City of London and Suburbs thereof and in the city of Edinburgh and Suburbs thereof, besides other cities towns and places yet to The Complainer unknown; And more particularly during one or all of the days or nights of one or all of the year Eighteen Hundred and Twenty One the said William Hazlitt

> Defender did cohabit and keep fellowship and company, and had carnal and adulterous intercourse and dealings with women one or more in the City of London or neighbourhood thereof whose names the Private Complainer has not yet learned [...]. (qtd. in Houck 116)

James Houck contrasts these court records with Benjamin Robert Haydon's anecdote wherein Hazlitt joked about hiring a "strumpet one eyed from disease" to obtain the proof of adultery required for divorce. The punch line to Hazlitt's grotesque joke is that

> no proof of the actual crime of adultery was necessary [...] as long as there was 'sufficient evidence of *solus cum sola*, of their being together with the doors shut and bolted, at unseasonable hours,' and if guilt had been acknowledged. (Houck 120)

Thus, the court records suggest less a begrudgingly fulfilled legal stipulation than a symptom of habit.

Unlike Houck, who privileges the court record over the joke in order to reveal the "real story" (115), Kurt Koenigsberger privileges the "circulation" of the joke over the "suggest[ions]" (296) of the court records to argue that Hazlitt would rather libel himself than "suffer the embarrassment of being known as a frequenter of brothels" (297). But Koenigsberger's hypothesis about Hazlitt's "embarrassment" as a john contradicts not only the records (if no forensic proof of even one adulterous crime was necessary, why confess to consorting with "women one or more" all over Britain?) but also biographical accounts of Hazlitt, as well as his own writing, including *Liber Amoris* (to which we'll return below).

For instance, Grayling points to Hazlitt's declaration that "if I were a law-giver [...] I would ordain that no woman should expose her shape publicly, unless she were a prostitute," to his jesting resolution in 1808 to "leave off wenching," and to P. G. Patmore's anecdote about "how kind and familiar [Hazlitt] was with the prostitutes in Whitehall" (Grayling 87; cf. Patmore 2.276-8).

Patmore's own descriptions of the Whitehall prostitutes as "petitioners", "protégées" and "not very creditable applicants" typify Victorian circumlocution on Hazlitt's whoring (2.276-8). Still more euphemistic (and understandably so), Hazlitt's grandson, William Carew Hazlitt, refers apologetically to his grandfather's "singular *voluptuousness* of temperament, which we find at the root of much that he *offended* against heaven and earth in, as well as of many of the fine things we owe to his pen." W. C. Hazlitt takes care to distinguish between the "sensualist" and the "sensuous man" to valorize his grandfather as the latter: in the sensualist, "the animal appetite obscures and deadens all loftier and purer instincts," whereas in the sensuous man, "an intense appreciation of the beautiful in Nature and Art is associated and intimately blended with those potent instincts which *endanger virtue*" (*Memoirs* 2.13, my emphases). By linking beauty's appreciation with the threat of decadence, W. C. Hazlitt describes his grandfather in terms that Kathy Psomiades identifies as central to Victorian aestheticism; similarly, the representation of Walker in *Liber Amoris* becomes a formative moment for the "doubled feminine paradigm--Madonna/Whore, Mary/Eve" in which Victorian bourgeois femininity, not only "separated from public political life [...] is also split between surface and depth, knowable exterior appearance and unknowable interior desires" (Psomiades 5).

W. C. Hazlitt also evinced anxiety over his grandfather's literary estate by censoring "the frankness of [Hazlitt's] confessional style" (Grayling ix). Gerald Lahey notes that W. C. Hazlitt, in publishing his grandfather's notorious diary of March 4-16, 1823 as "Liber Amoris. Part II" (*Lamb and Hazlitt* 117-37), altered or omitted "all mention of bodily intimacies or improprieties of speech" (qtd. in Hazlitt, *Letters* 19). One alteration holds particular pertinence for this investigation: W. C. Hazlitt replaced the word "whore" in Hazlitt's demand "to know that she [Walker] is a whore" with the nonsensical "nane" (383). In William Hazlitt, Jr.'s edition of the *Literary Remains of the Late William Hazlitt,* the only sin of the father mentioned by the son is his "recourse to stimulants of wine and spirits," (xxii); and only in contributions by Mr. Johns (who conducted Hazlitt's funeral) and Sergeant Talfourd, respectively, do we find faint allusions to Hazlitt's "practical errors" (xxvi) and "personal frailties" (lxix).

Sarah Hazlitt's diary holds more evidence of Hazlitt's "wenching." On the evening of Tuesday, April 30, 1822, she and Hazlitt discussed child custody and parenting:

> He said he could do very well for the child himself [...] I said, I did not dispute his fondness for him; but I must observe, that though he got a great deal of money; he never saved, or had any by him; or was likely to make much provision for the child. Neither could I think it was proper, or for his welfare, that he should take him to the Fives Court, and such places: and carry him out with him when he went picking up the girls on the town: it was likely to corrupt and vitiate him, and bring him up to like such ruinous practices. He said perhaps the last was wrong; but that he did not know that it was any good to bring up children in ignorance of the world. [...] He said I had always despised him, and his abilities. I asked if the women with whom he associated, were any better judges of them. (196)

Again, Haydon--who himself had been one acquainted with the night-walkers (Holland, Interview)--corroborates this revelation of Hazlitt's family values, in an 1824 diary entry detailing how Hazlitt "brings strumpets into his Parlour, where was his poor, innocent, little, lovely Boy" (qtd. in Jones, "Haydon" 173).

One detail of Hazlitt's habit with special relevance for the study of *Liber Amoris* receives only brief mention by two of Hazlitt's biographers. In their accounts of the Hazlitts' Edinburgh divorce, both Grayling (275) and Stanley Jones (321) note with irony the name of the only prostitute identified in the court records: a teenage whore named Mary Walker. Close to nineteen-year-old Sarah Walker in age and name, Mary Walker displaced Hazlitt's desire to *marry* Sarah Walker during his stay in Edinburgh. Consequently, Sarah Walker's own name evokes the "Night-Walkers" of London (Mudge 229), the wife Hazlitt no longer desired, and what in whores Hazlitt always found--"the lineaments of gratified desire" (Blake 162).

Writing Out Sarah (Night) Walker

Turning to *Liber Amoris* itself, we find that Hazlitt *wrote out* the historical Walker as a literary night-walker, both erasing and representing her, in the way he composed and publicized *Liber Amoris,* to insinuate that she was what he "dare not name" (*Liber Amoris* 84). As the book's more astute critics have recognized, *Liber Amoris* was, in the words of Hazlitt's grandson, "a literary and artificial composition, rather than a faithful transfer of the actual conversations" (175).

Marilyn Butler notes the "highly conscious literary manner" in which Hazlitt wrote his letters to Patmore "with at least half an eye to publication" (215-16), and how, when editing these letters for the book, he cut out phrases such as "is it not to write whore, hardened, impudent, heartless whore after her name?" (215). Michael Mason concurs: "a good deal in the way of direct sexual allusion is omitted in the published version" (129). Butler also notes how Hazlitt excluded two crucial documents: his letter from June 18, 1822, in which he transcribed "the conversation below stairs" (Hazlitt, *Liber Amoris* 224) about the size of his fellow lodger's penis; and his diary from March, 1823, in which we read "Hazlitt at his most Lovelacian," getting a friend "to test Sarah's virtue by attempting to seduce her" (Butler 216-17). Butler observes that *Liber Amoris* was Hazlitt's contribution to a changing, "quieter" literary market that "wanted something lighter, more personal, and perhaps profitably titillating" than "the political polemic which had been one staple of [Hazlitt's] writing" (218). However, her conjecture that Hazlitt left out these explicit documents "presumably, for decency's sake" (216) finds substantiation in *Liber Amoris*' prefatory "advertisement," which ascribes the book's anonymity to the threat of "consequences arising from publication" (64). Critics quickly blew the book's anonymous cover, but the advertisment's nominal deference to libel and obscenity laws made it a cagey disclaimer at a time when the Society for the Suppression of Vice enforced the official intolerance of obscene publications. "Responsible for some fifty-five prosecutions between 1802 and 1824," the Society tended to target vendors who sold obscene prints or books in public (Mudge 246). In 1822, the Society arrested William Benbow, proprietor of the Byron's Head bookshop and a "coconspirator" of radicals like John Hunt, the publisher of *Liber Amoris* (251). Benbow got off by claiming literary merit for the materials he sold (247). That Hazlitt sought to bestow similar merit to *Liber Amoris* by revising or deleting ostensible obscenities becomes a striking instance of how literature can be defined historically as the repression of pornography (Mudge 10).

Butler's reference to Hazlitt's self-censorship only hints at the frequency with which he cut phrases and passages out of the manuscript and letters from which he worked. In "The Quarrel," references to "following" or "making free" replace those to "kissing" (Wu qtd. in Hazlitt, *Selected Writings* 7: 263), and lines of asterisks replace descriptions of petticoats being pulled up (264). Lines of asterisks recur throughout the book (92, 109, 119, 123, 133, 135, 241), but the irony in their censorial use is that while they mark that which must not be read, they enable a reader to imagine whatever one desires; so, where a nod to decency was intended, unlimited prurience is permitted.

In "Letter IX," Hazlitt changes a passage in his original letter to Patmore. Where the letter reads, " I think you a whore" (*Letters* 282), the book reads, "I think you a common adventurer" (*Liber Amoris* 151, my emphasis). He also deletes unpleasant declarations that "the bitch likes the nasty" and that "I have only lost [...] a girl that will be a bawd to elderly gentlemen and that with her own person" (*Letters* 283), as well as the first notions of his plan to "get someone to try her" (284)--a plan that he would carry out only a few short months before his better behaved literary representative would be savaged by reviews.

"Letter X" is based on a letter sent July 10, 1822 (Wu in Hazlitt, *Selected Writings* 269) that reveals Hazlitt at his most vituperative. In the *Liber Amoris* version, the protagonist contemplates his "sole queen and mistress" (159) amidst vistas of the Northern "romantic country" (157). In the original, we find Hazlitt's account of the aforementioned "below stairs" conversation, followed by exclamations that Walker is "all that I say of her, a whore" (*Letters*

271), then, contrarily, that "I do not say she is a whore, I only say she is a bitch" (272), among other, more graphic insults.

But Hazlitt retains several significant references to prostitution in the published book. The first occurs early in the text, where he refers to Walker as "my Infelice" (74). Hazlitt had taken this nickname from a character in Thomas Dekker's play *The Honest Whore,* and, as Wu notes, already applied it to Walker in the essay "On Great and Little Things," published in the February, 1822, issue of the *New Monthly Magazine* (qtd. in Hazlitt, *Selected Writings* 263).

Liber Amoris' other references to prostitution depend on Hazlitt's uncommonly frequent use of the word "common," a word repeated in the chapter "The Quarrel." Here, H (Hazlitt's pseudonymous persona) tells S (i.e. Sarah Walker) that he suspects "you were what I dare not name--a common lodging-house decoy, a kissing convenience, that your lips were as common as the stairs" (84); thus, he paradoxically names what he dare not name. "Common woman" was a common name for prostitutes ("Common" 565); even the adjective alone could signify as much (Gay 2613). Shakespeare, a common source for the literary allusions that litter *Liber Amoris*, provides previously unidentified sources for H's charge that S's "lips were as common as the stairs" and his comparison of S to "the commonest creature"; these sources have gone unnoticed in all annotated editions of *Liber Amoris.* The latter quote alludes to *Richard II*, where Percy describes how King Henry's son "would [...] from the common'st creature pluck a glove" (5.3.16-17); the former, to *Cymbeline,* wherein the smitten Jachimo imagines himself "slaver[ing] with lips as common as the stairs that mount the Capitol" (1.7.105-6).

The whorish connotation of "common" occasions the conspicuous abundance of this adjective throughout *Liber Amoris,* adding everywhere a perverse dimension to its reading. So when H describes S's lack of "love for [Tomkins] beyond common regard" (150) on the page facing Hazlitt's aforementioned revision of "whore" as "a common adventurer" (151), the edited phrase remains redolent of prostitution. In the final chapter, "To J.S.K---," H compares S to "a common courtesan, who *bilks* a customer" (249), as if to clarify precisely how "common" is to be read.

In the context of Hazlitt's confessional style (i.e. his use of personal correspondence to compose the manuscript), the ironic resonance of "common" permits us to read in *Liber Amoris* an elliptical admission of Hazlitt's guilt for his whoring. In "Letter XI", H laments, "it was not to be supposed I should ever meet even with the outward demonstrations of regard from any woman but a common trader in the endearments of love!" (163). The June 28, 1822 letter to Patmore on which "Letter XI" is based shows a shift in meaning: "it was not likely I s[hould ever meet] even with the outward demonstration[4] of love [from] any woman but a common lodging-house decoy" (Hazlitt, *Letters* 279). In footnote "4", the editor of Hazlitt's letters mentions that "outward demonstration" has been inserted to replace "profession" (Sikes qtd. in Hazlitt, *Letters* 279). The double negative and emphatic constructions in both versions of this sentence obscure a reversal in the statement's meaning: in the correspondence version, Hazlitt writes that only "a common lodging-house decoy" (i.e. Walker herself) would profess or demonstrate "love" for him; in the manuscript version, H says that only a "common trader" (i.e. a prostitute) would demonstrate "regard" for him. The two versions of this convoluted, heavily edited declaration, together with H's assertion elsewhere that S is "the only woman that ever made me think she loved me" (93), yield an admission to traffic with prostitutes and a characterization of Walker as prostitute.

This connotation of "common" also complicates a textual, sexual distinction drawn by

Hazlitt between himself as author and his protagonist, H, through the meticulous excision of explicit references to prostitution. The hymeneal confusion between author and protagonist results from what Tim Fulford reads in the book as an "undermining revision of romantic self-narrative" (240). Mason's observation that Hazlitt's omission of "boastful" as well as embarrassing sexual references was perhaps his attempt to make H "more high-minded" than his autobiographical counterpart (Mason 129) speaks to a tendency on the part of the book's critics to read H biographically. Unfortunately, Mason also reinscribes an all-too familiar consequence of this biographical reading--"that Sarah Walker may have been a cold-hearted flirt" (129)--to which we now turn.

Sexual Politics in Literary History

Before *Liber Amoris* appeared on May 9, 1823, Hazlitt "went up and down London, raving about this girl" (De Quincey 79). Compulsively repeating what Barry Cornwall recollected as the tiresome, "minute details of his love story" (81), Hazlitt effectively spread some advance, word-of-mouth publicity for his forthcoming book. Not that it worked: the book sold poorly (Grayling 300), due in part to reviews like that of Shackell's *Register*, which virtually "pirated the text in eighteen closely printed columns of selections" and thus "made it hardly necessary to lay down money to read it" (Jones, *Hazlitt* 338). Poor sales or not, Hazlitt had already sold his copyright to the printer C. H. Reynell for £100 (Le Gallienne xx), making more money that way than he likely would have through royalties--which weren't innovated until Elizabeth Gaskell's pioneering royalty agreement with Chapman and Hall in 1855 (Saunders 139).

The *Register* review became an early instance of how critical literature on *Liber Amoris* would consistently trust Hazlitt's representation of Walker's character as historical reality. Jones writes that the *Register* review not only identified Walker but branded her, "without reprieve, and as undoubted fact, as 'an artful, shameless, trumpery, common strumpet'" (338). Ironically, prior to this point in his biography of Hazlitt, Jones has already judged Walker "a coquette; of that there is no doubt" (314).

Even more ironically, Charles Mahoney's "*Liber Amoris*: Figuring Out the Coquette," cites Jones' unproblematic judgment to support an argument that fetishizes Walker's "inscrutable figurality" (30) as "an incalculable cost, a figure that cannot, finally, be reckoned" (38). Claiming that Walker's incalculability precludes any judgment on whether she is or isn't a coquette (42), Mahoney fails to acknowledge that this incalculability paradoxically fixes her value as a coquette in his "Barthesian economy" (33): "one cannot acquire a coquette; her attractiveness has everything to do with her unobtainability" (39). Adhering to the Romantic ideology that has implicated apologists of Hazlitt as defamers of Sarah Walker, Mahoney takes Hazlitt's word for Sarah Walker's "forward and flirtatious behavior" even as he distances himself from Hazlitt's attempt "to determine any categorical difference between a wanton and a modest girl" (29).

"[W]hether in the body of Hazlitt's narrative, or as the objective embodiment of his desire" (31), figuring Walker as a coquette permits Mahoney to identify her with *Liber Amoris* itself: the book "disarms criticism [...] it refuses our advances" (41). Mahoney's conflation of Walker, S and the book itself embodies Psomiades' theory "that the category of the aesthetic in bourgeois culture is itself predicated upon the figuration of art as a beautiful female body" (14).

In addition, a spectre of whoredom that Mahoney dare not name haunts his discussion of Walker's coquetry. Writing that Hazlitt "fears he may have been no more significant than a customer" (28), Mahoney insinuates prostitution, but the exact change on which the oldest profession depends would upset this critic's economy of Barthesian incalculability, in which Hazlitt "cannot gain any sort of 'purchase'" (38). Mahoney makes much ado about Walker's coquetry on the basis of H's declaration "that a pretty, reserved, modest, delicate-looking girl" should act like "a professed wanton [...] is new, and, I think, worth explaining. It was, I confess, out of my calculation, and may be out of that of others" (Hazlitt, *Liber Amoris* 250; cf. Mahoney 28). However, to read "out of" strictly as "beyond" is to ignore the ambiguity whereby "out of" can also mean "caused by"--especially given its adjacency here to "confess." The sense of "out of" as "caused by" recurs (as often as its other sense) throughout *Liber Amoris*: in Part I, S tells H that "You sit and fancy things out of your own head" (91); in "Letter IV", H asks his correspondent if it's possible "that she has bestowed her loved 'endearments' on me (her own sweet word) out of true regard?" (125). Thus, H confesses not only to his inability to read S but also to his author's perpetration of what we'd now call sexual harassment (see below) and his calculated literary construction of S. In the sentence immediately following H's demand for an explanation, Hazlitt supplies one: he has colluded with "others" to calculate what he may earn by turning his sexual obsession into a literary commodity.

Nevertheless, in relating *Liber Amoris* to Barthes' *A Lover's Discourse*, Mahoney's article represents one of the less generic essays in genre criticism that have followed Robert Ready's challenge to the scholarly consensus that the book's value is strictly biographical (47). Ready's essay remains a revealing symptom of how defenses of the literary value of *Liber Amoris* become defenses of the literary as such. In Ready's reading, Liber Amoris exemplifies a literary paradigm of influences (50-1), intertextual parallels and allusions (50, 55), and unified imagery, organized according to a "logic of passion" (61) consistent with "Hazlitt's recurrent theme of the sympathetic imagination" (47).

After Ready, the majority of *Liber Amoris*' literary defenders tend to find more specific genres in which to rehabilitate the book. Gary Kelly discusses its "relentlessly literary" but generically elusive relation to what he calls the "quasi-novel" (169). James Mulvihill reads *Liber Amoris* as an "anatomy (or Menippean satire)," for which the central "hypothesis to be rigorously tested and debated" is "character" (195). Despite the specified genre context, Mulvihill's description of "Hazlitt's anatomic approach to his subject" (195) and H's "cruel dissection of [S's] character" (202) unpleasantly evokes the "ugly scene" (Grayling 291) documented in Hazlitt's journal of March 4-16, 1823 (*Letters* 379-89).

Koenigsberger perceptively summarizes the stakes for these essays in *sui generis* genre criticism:

> By all accounts [...] *Liber Amoris* represents an anomalous phenomenon within the Hazlitt canon [...] part of a critical discourse that records *Liber Amoris*' exceptionality within an interpretive economy characterized by a logic of the excluded middle: for those critics most interested in Hazlitt's biography, *Liber Amoris* remains an eccentricity, an unfortunate accretion to (or secretion of) Hazlitt's main body of work, while for those critics interested in reclaiming *Liber Amoris* as a chief member of Hazlitt's literary corpus [...] the text's difference is notable precisely because it should not be noticed at all. (286-7)

If, in the corpus of Hazlitt scholarship and literary criticism, *Liber Amoris* is repeatedly called to defend its own literary value and literature in general *at Walker's continuing expense*, would we be wrong to pronounce (as generations of readers would pronounce of Walker herself) that, in Bataille's words, "literature *had* to plead guilty"? (x)

To read Walker described as a "loose-fish" in period magazines like *Blackwood's* (183), or as a "sententious little hussey" (xvi) in Richard Le Gallienne's 1894 edition of *Liber Amoris* reveals that Hazlitt's erasure of explicit imputations could destroy Sarah Walker's character as easily as their retention. If subsequent critics of *Liber Amoris* have tended less vituperatively to suspend disbelief over Hazlitt's whorish characterization of Walker, the fact they have not dispensed with this suspense altogether remains a pernicious streak of misogyny in Romantic ideology.

The degree to which even current criticism extends this streak is evident in Mahoney's aforementioned article and in others by Wu and James Treadwell. These three defend *Liber Amoris* against feminist critiques of the book by Hofkosh and Catherine Burroughs, critiques that relegate the interpretive economy of literary capital to the periphery of a different critical terrain in which questions of gender, sexual politics, and class become central to literary history.

Treadwell dismisses the 1994 anthology *At the Limits of Romanticism* (¶24)--and Hofkosh's contribution to it in particular--as a symptom of critical methods like new historicism and feminism that are apparently irrelevant to the period texts with which they deal. Mahoney disagrees with Hofkosh (30) and damns Burroughs by faint praise (45-6 n.14). But what's most telling is how both Treadwell and Mahoney defer any mention of Hazlitt's feminist critics to their footnotes.

Two different versions of Wu essay in question were published in 2000; one titled "Hazlitt's 'Sexual Harassment'" takes issue with Anne Mellor and Richard Matlak's anthology, *British Literature 1780-1830*. Wu criticizes Burroughs' observation that Hazlitt's characterization of Walker "has licensed the 'sexist readings of several generations of critics'" (199), and he charges Hofkosh with "imply[ing], without explicitly saying, that Hazlitt was guilty of serial sexual harassment" (200). Then Wu claims that Mellor and Matlak's "decision to confine Hazlitt to two and a half pages appears to have been taken on the grounds of 'his campaign of sexual harassment'--though [...] this connection is not explicitly made" (201). Wu concludes that to marginalize Hazlitt "on the grounds of his alleged 'sexual harassment' is as impercipient as it is unjust" (213). Practicing precisely the kind of "anti-feminism" with which he expects to be charged for objecting to the anthology (201-2), Wu suggests that sexual harassment here is less an identifiable social problem than an anachronistic use of feminist jargon (see Brownmiller 279-94 on the provenance of the term). Yet Wu ignores the frequent references to "harassment" in the very work he defends. "Sir, you have no right to harass my feelings in the manner you do," S tells H in "The Quarrel" (*Liber Amoris* 87); and, in the letter "To S. L.", H confesses that he "did all I could to torment myself and harass you by endless doubts and jealousy" (166).

Despite his backlash, Wu sets out the best hypothesis yet for "why Hazlitt decided to publish a work that did him no good whatever" ("Defence" 21) by noting an overlooked comment wherein Hazlitt determines "to furnish [his periodical enemies] with some ground for their idle and malevolent censures" (qtd. in Wu 24). Wu interprets *Liber Amoris* as a "foreign" text (i.e. one that idolizes Napoleon and emulates "a Rousseau-esque aesthetic") that Hazlitt published at a time "when the English were aggressively xenophobic" (25). Thus, *Liber Amoris* became "a weapon in a bitter literary battle that he had been waging for years" (24-5).

The three overlapping contexts whereby Robert Lapp "anatomiz[es] the public discourse of the Regency" help us to summarize how Wu, Butler and Fulford analyze the role of Liber Amoris in this "literary battle": Wu examines "the arena of public political debate"; Butler, "the volatile and competitive marketplace for literature"; and Fulford, "the shifting hierarchy of genres and modes by which authority was constructed within public discourse" (Lapp 16).

For Fulford, *Liber Amoris* attacks what Hazlitt called "the cold indifference and prostituted gallantry of this philosophic age" (qtd. in Fulford 235). Fulford suggests that Hazlitt's "imagery of cruelty and whoredom" (233) turns Sarah into "the sexual symbol of the spirit of the age as he saw it--one in which all ideals [especially chivalric ideals] are corrupted by the desire for financial gain" (234-5). Like Hofkosh (134), Fulford reads the book that De Quincey said was "universally laughed at" (qtd. in Fulford 232) in the context of the "watershed" trial of Queen Caroline in 1820 (24), which Hazlitt famously dismissed as "a scene for history to laugh at!" (qtd. in Fulford 227). In *Liber Amoris*, Hazlitt writes of Walker's "queen-like grace" (109), later describes her as "the sole queen" of his thoughts (159), and tells her that she looks "like a queen" (204). Hazlitt's imagery of whoredom debases that of queendom to represent "the sexual symbol of the spirit of the age."

Rendering this political debasement painfully personal, Anne Haverty's novelization of Walker's side of the story, *The Far Side of a Kiss*, mounts a potent feminist critique of *Liber Amoris* by means of historical fiction. Walker herself narrates the novel, starting her story by contrasting how Hazlitt used to call her "his queen" with how she is now "as ruined as if I had my own gaudy couch to loll on in a bawdy-house" (1). Alert to Hazlitt's professedly radical politics, Walker asks:

> Is it not very unjust now that he should use his genius to such effect as to insult me, whom he used to call his queen? But he has as much fondness for a queen as he has for a Tory so I might have known from the start his endearments were tainted with hypocrisy. (33)

Haverty imagines the Walker family as a middle-class reading household of the kind historicized by Jon Klancher (77-8), and Walker's own narrative as a Gothic nightmare in which silence is both her defense (218) and her destruction (227). When her sister shows Walker the reference to herself in the *New Monthly*, she is horrified at the depth of Hazlitt's obsession and his willingness to publicize it. "He felt free to bandy my character about," she says. "I was no more than meat to feed his musings." (171). This scene ironically echoes Hazlitt's own anxiety over how Walker and other women acquaintances read about his own character in periodicals like *Blackwood's* (Patmore, 2.350-2; W. C. Hazlitt, *Memoirs* 2.26).

Far from a coquette or a courtesan, Haverty's Walker is an acutely class-conscious girl who deconstructs Hazlitt's desire but also obliges it in the name of household duty, "in so far as it did not go against me in my health or reputation" (34). The novel thus explores the implications of Burroughs' crucial insight that "most critics [...] do not bother to consider her predicament as a young girl required by economic necessity to be friendly to the men living in her father's boardinghouse" (127). Trapped in a familial work regimen that affords her less freedom than that of a hired servant (Haverty 54), Walker thinks of herself "not [as] a personage

Miss Austen would ever think of putting in a book" (53) and concludes her story in a domestic confinement imposed by her scandalized family, where she rages against the book of "self-love" that "lives in the world, just as I do, and gets about a great deal more" (241). This bitter reflection echoes Walker's earlier complaint that Hazlitt's book subjects her to the infamy of public circulation (48), and resonates balefully with the colloquial sense of "getting about"--what whores, or women impugned as such, might be said to do. As Kappeler argues, there is "something ‘sexist’, certainly faintly (softly) pornographic in the idea of mass circulation" (27). Hazlitt consigns his "common adventurer" to circulate among England’s "common reader[s]" (Altick 4).

In its claustrophobic closure, Haverty's novel shares with much recent criticism of *Liber Amoris* a convenient omission of the known facts about the fate of the historical Walker, whose relationship with John Tomkins (whom Hazlitt had suspected her of loving) remained common-law until he widowed her in 1858 (Jones, *Hazlitt* 382-3). It remains unclear whether she never married by choice or due to the scandal of what Derrida would call Hazlitt's "dissemination into the folds of the hymen" (271). But what Haverty and Hofkosh make clear enough is that Walker would never have dared to bring legal action against a writer so fond of libel litigation (Koenigsberger 292-4). Hofkosh explains "the double bind of the victim of sexual violence in the early nineteenth century":

> If she talks, she is condemned as immodest or malicious and thus not legally violable; if she remains silent in deference to prevailing attitudes toward female chastity, she cannot bring her attacker to justice nor collect damages. (140 n.5)

By realistically fictionalizing Walker's ambivalence about her silence, Haverty calls attention to the fact that Walker's silence in *Liber Amoris* itself was far from total.

"Common to my imagination"

Hazlitt's appropriation of Walker's voice "casts a very interesting light on the male Romantic romancing of women's silence," a "romance of the unheard" canonized in poems like Wordsworth's "Solitary Reaper" or Keats' "Ode on a Grecian urn" (Holland qtd. in McCutcheon). Hazlitt "creates the solipsistic language of which he is master, which imagines his enslavement to [...] a female other" (Fulford 234); however, to facilitate this imaginary enslavement, Hazlitt "scripted a woman who, through her straightforward speech and minimal words, communicates the dilemma of many women in the serving classes in early nineteenth-century England" (Burroughs 128). Although Hazlitt *cast* Sarah Walker as a statue, she did not play the part convincingly (Burroughs 129; cf. Hazlitt, *Liber Amoris* 93). S's iconoclastic utterances deconstruct H's fantasy of male desire in the middle of its scene, rendering H (and Hazlitt) as

> the emperor whose attempts to clothe himself in the robes of literary authority are so grotesque that they reveal those robes to be tawdry trappings of an assumed power only maintained by the communal suspension of disbelief in its fictionality. (Fulford 240)

Holland, who notes elsewhere "Hazlitt's customary procedure of organizing critical response within a rhetoric of virility" ("Coleridge" 121), suggests that *Liber Amoris* engages the "bitter literary battle" of its day--and the critical skirmishes of our own--by combining Hazlitt's "street-fighting" political radicalism with his libidinal libertinism (qtd. in McCutcheon). Forcing questions of sexual politics into the public sphere, dramatizing "how the intrusion of imagination into the political arena can lead to a slavish submission to legitimacy" (Whale 116), *Liber Amoris* might relate more clearly to Hazlitt's theory of the "customary imagination" (119) than to that of the sympathetic imagination. Whereas John Whale conspicuously omits *Liber Amoris* from his treatment of "Hazlitt's response to Burke" (111), Fulford considers the book a crucial part of this response, a story of imagination's all-too common enlistment by what Whale calls "slavish opinion and prejudice" (117), represented here by a sexist status quo for which

> the female figure, through its simultaneous connections with commodification and trade on the one hand, and violence and difference on the other, plays a central role in the constitution of [...] capitalist ideology. (Brown 3)

That *Liber Amoris* dramatizes Hazlitt's theory of the "customary imagination" invites a reading of Paulin's interpretation of *Liber Amoris* against its disdainful grain. Paulin dismisses the book as an "exploration of imaginative extremity" through the "kitsch language" of "recycled clichés" and "dead surprises" (44-5). But Hazlitt's misogynistic stereotypes not only objectify women as "common" commodities, they also debase authors and critics alike in an increasingly totalized capitalist culture that finds its *ne plus ultra* in the traffic of prostitution. A recognition that the discourse of prostitution supplements *Liber Amoris* spares nobody who trades in letters from the ridicule it invites, since this discourse "reinforces the commercial grounding of books and their pleasures" and implicates readers and johns alike in "a continuum of corruption" (Mudge 75-6), according to the common eighteenth-century caricature of professional authorship as literary prostitution.

Our reading of *Liber Amoris* in the context of prostitution enables this historically mystifying and mystified text to provide something like a middle term between symptomatic sexism and a kind of feminism attuned to the complicity of culture and misogyny in instituting and reproducing canonical structures of representation. On the one hand, this reading cannot help but add interest to the cultural capital that many of the aforementioned critics have invested in *Liber Amoris*. On the other, it finds in Hazlitt's negotiations of desire and the literary market not only a whorish defamation of Walker but, moreover, "a studied renunciation of chivalry" (Holland qtd. in McCutcheon) whereby these negotiations critique the commodification of literature as the prostitution of culture. "I am afraid she will soon grow common to my imagination," H concludes, "as well as worthless in herself" (*Liber Amoris* 256). By this terminal point in the story, we become acutely aware of how common H's imagination can be, and of our own complicity in reproducing the institution of literature as a certain kind of common knowledge.

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