

**LIBER AMORIS, OR,
THE NEW
PYGMALION**

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WILLIAM HAZLITT & RICHARD LE GALLIENNE

**LIBER AMORIS, OR,
THE NEW
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LIBER AMORIS

Or the New Pygmalion

BY

WILLIAM HAZLITT

With an Introduction by

RICHARD LE GALLIENNE

LONDON

ELKIN MATHEWS & JOHN LANE
AT THE SIGN OF THE BODLEY HEAD
IN VIGO STREET

1893

Jan 1893. 42, Dialect
1893. June 7th

THE RIGHT OF EDITORIAL DEDICATION HAS RECENTLY BEEN CALLED IN QUESTION. ALL THE SAME, IT HAS MUCH SUPPORT OF NOTABLE EXAMPLE, ANCIENT AND MODERN; AND, THEREFORE, AFTER THE FIRST OFFERING OF THIS NEW EDITION OF THE "LIBER AMORIS" TO THE HONOURED SHADE OF HIM WHO MADE IT, I DESIRE TO ASSOCIATE MY UNIMPORTANT SHARE IN ITS ISSUE WITH THE NAME OF LORD DE TABLEY, IN RESPECTFUL ADMIRATION OF HIS FINE GIFTS AS A POET, AND EMBOLDENED BY A FELLOWSHIP OF REGARD FOR THE GENIUS OF WILLIAM HAZLITT.

R. LE G.

MAY 10, 1893.



INTRODUCTION.

If the reading of the "Liber Amoris" is not exactly a disappointment, at least it gives one a different kind of pleasure from that which we very probably expected. One looked, may be, for a beautiful garden of fancy, but soon found that the appeal was not so much to one's sense of beauty, as to one's curiosity, one's sense of humour, one's pity, sometimes even one's contempt. A few fine sentences are to be met with, but singularly few, and it is in fact not as literature, but as a document, "a document in madness," that the book has its value. Even had it not been written by Hazlitt it would have possessed this value, but in relation to him it becomes doubly interesting: for, at first sight, it seems that no aberration could have

been less characteristic of his morose and unsympathetic nature. De Quincey tells us that the book greatly raised Hazlitt in his opinion, for this very reason "by shewing him to be capable of stronger and more agitating passions than" he "believed to be within the range of his nature." All the same, though erotic passion may have seemed foreign to Hazlitt, he had passions vehement enough in other directions. The vehemence of his political passions was notorious, his letter to Gifford was as fine a burst of anger as can be imagined, and he had a gift for misunderstanding his friends, of taking petty slights, which was continually hurrying him into ungovernable rage.

He seems to have been incapable, in his daily life, of taking broad views, and he was as irritably alive to every little "insult," or semblance of it, as the most ignorant young miss. When he imagined such, even in the case of friends of proved loyalty, he never stopped to think, never allowed any sense of affection or gratitude to suggest

that he might be mistaken, but flew at once into absurd passion, and proceeded, if possible, to pillory the offender in his next essay. Mr. P. G. Patmore, in "My Friends and Acquaintance," gives several examples of this curious failing. You had only to accidentally pass him in the street, without having seen him, and he would at once decide that you had cut him, and go about seeking your scalp.

The persistent attacks upon him in *Blackwood's Magazine*, low and personal to a degree hardly realisable in our day, when we have seldom the excitement of a really spirited set-to among men of letters, and "knuckle-dusters" are forbidden, doubtless, aggravated this irritable self-consciousness. He could never forget that he was "pimpled Hazlitt," and the epithet made him skulk through the streets like a criminal, and made him especially sensitive in the presence of women, who, he felt sure, were always saying it over to themselves. It is impossible without a long quotation from Mr. Patmore, to give the reader any idea of the painful extremes of

feeling to which this morbid sensitiveness subjected him.

For instance,—during the first week or fortnight after the appearance of (let us suppose) one of *Blackwood's* articles about him, if he entered a coffee-house where he was known, to get his dinner, it was impossible (he thought) that the waiters could be doing anything else all the time he was there, but pointing him out to guests as “the gentleman who was so abused last month in *Blackwood's Magazine*.” If he knocked at the door of a friend, the look and reply of the servant (whatever they might be), made it evident to him that he had been reading *Blackwood's Magazine* before the family were up in the morning! If he had occasion to call at any of the publishers for whom he might be writing at the time, the case was still worse,—inasmuch as there his bread was at stake, as well as that personal civility, which he valued no less. Mr. Colburn would be “not within,” as a matter of course; for his clerks to even ascertain his pleasure on that point beforehand would be wholly superfluous: had they not all chuckled over the article at their tea the evening before? Even the instinct of the shop-boys would catch the cue from the significant looks of those above them, and refuse to take his name to Mr. Ollier. They would “believe he was gone to dinner.” He could not, they thought, want to have anything to say to a person who, as it were, went about with a sheet of *Black-*

wood's pinned to his coat-tail like a dish-clout!

Then at home at his lodgings, if the servant who waited upon him did not answer his bell the first time—Ah! 'twas clear—She had read *Blackwood's*, or heard talk of it at the bar of the public-house when she went for the beer! Did the landlady send up his bill a day earlier than usual, or ask for payment of it less civilly than was her custom—how could he wonder at it? It was *Blackwood's* doing. But if she gave him notice to quit (on the score, perhaps, of his inordinately late hours) he was a lost man! for would anybody take him in after having read *Blackwood's*? Even the strangers that he met in the streets seemed to look at him askance, "with jealous leer malignant," as if they knew him by intuition for a man on whom was set the double seal of public and private infamy; the doomed and denounced of *Blackwood's Magazine*.

[An inherent lack of humour was probably the spring of Hazlitt's defects.] Mr. Patmore says too that "an ingrained selfishness, more or less influenced or modified all the other points of his nature," and certainly the general complexion of Hazlitt's life seems at least to have been that of gloomy self-absorption. However, it will be fair here to recall Barry Cornwall's more