

Literature and the Emotions: Hazlitt, Stendhal

Patrizia Lombardo

University of Geneva, Switzerland

Successful literature offers either directly or indirectly rich descriptions of actions and emotions of human beings. I will first examine in this paper what can be called the general theory of emotions in Hazlitt and Stendhal. Their approach to affectivity stood in opposition to the most common Romantic sentimentalism at the beginning of the 19th century: they believed in fact that the heart and the reason were not enemies but on the contrary deeply inter-connected. Both writers were convinced that most human activities are motivated by emotions, but were utterly suspicious of condescending sentimental attitudes, and condemned Rousseau's complacency in his own feelings.

I will then focus on a specific faculty of the mind as understood by Hazlitt in his essays, and by Stendhal in his various writings and his novels: the imagination as the capability of combining the real and the possible, and therefore analyzing by conjecture and thought experiments both the past and the future.