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THE BUBBLE REPUTATION: WILLIAM PITT

THE YOUNGER IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

THE YOUNGER PITT, during his career in public life (beginning in 1784, when at twenty-four he became the youngest prime minister in English history) was anathema to those contemporary writers who were to prove most influential in the course of English literature: the Lake Poets—Coleridge, Wordsworth, and Southey—and essayists such as Hazlitt. Logical and conservative, the official voice of the government and—perhaps more offensively—the leader in a war against a France in the grip of the Revolution and its various aftermaths, Pitt was a natural target for the wrath of the enthusiastic young Romantics. During his lifetime, most of the articulate and significant men of letters opposed him.

Because serious writers attempt to deal with universal truths rather than transitory events and attitudes, their reaction to a public figure should crystallize the babbling springs of public opinion and thereby hold importance for the future. In the case of Pitt, this future did not look encouraging. He had lived reviled by the bright young men of letters, and he died unquestionably engulfed in failure, with Napoleon riding in triumph over the European continent.

What, then, could the next century have to say for Pitt? How literature deals with an eminent man after his death may be examined with some interest in the case of Pitt. The conclusion will not come as a surprise but as an affirmation of a principle already recognized. Time mellows, smooths, heals over. The process necessarily involves a certain loss of zest and energy and the replacement of these qualities by bland platitudes, perhaps reflecting better judgment. The young gadflies grow old, die out, lapse into silence. After fifty years, even the most stubborn die-hards are heard from no longer. The causes that once burned so hotly become unimportant. A new generation rises to power—men who have not lived through the old problems and therefore understand them only indirectly as dead text-book issues. If bitter enemies gradually vanish, so do fiercely partisan friends. Both become quaint ana-

chronisms, like people in outdated clothes. Anyone who cares about such things will try to keep up with the new fashions, even though they are likely to hang awkwardly on rheumatic old figures. Both old hatreds and old loyalties are superfluous once their object is off the scene.

The man himself, as controversy dwindles, assumes the place in history where coming generations will find him. Many personages who looked as mighty as any while in office tumble into oblivion at this point. Pitt was man enough not to do so. Although—like a host of statesmen with good intentions—he was betrayed by circumstance, his motives, intelligence, and integrity proved sufficient to hold their own. The nineteenth century, therefore, went forward with the work of kneading him into a pellet for convenient insertion into the history books. Most Americans must think twice to recall which side was taken by Washington and Jefferson, by Adams and Hamilton, on a dozen issues that were violently controversial in their day, or even on the basic political philosophy that was to guide the young nation they launched. The traditional view emphasizes qualities rather than issues: honesty, courage, a certain natural nobility. This is what time does for public figures, and in this task literary men are among its most accurate reflectors. The nineteenth century in England was, perhaps, a particularly apt milieu for regularizing and smoothing a controversial career. In a steady trend to humanitarianism, the era prided itself on understanding individuals, reforming institutions, and giving due rights to both.

The process of homogenizing public attitude toward Pitt was, of course, a gradual one. His death was the occasion for a flurry of extravagant tributes by his staunch admirers; but it could not immediately cancel all the grievances of the still youthful writers who had been his bitter enemies. Most of these, even after they had grown old and stodgy and some were nominal conservatives, remembered him with a shudder of repugnance. Living on as they did into the century after Pitt's own, they represent one stream of posthumous attitude toward him—except that they were largely silent on the subject. A sense of ambiguity, an uneasiness of conscience, well may explain this.

Less than three weeks after Pitt's death in 1806, the most generous of the Lake Poets, Wordsworth, summed up his opinion of Pitt in a letter to Sir George Beaumont. Wordsworth first mentioned the loss of Nelson, and then continued:

Mr. Pitt is also gone! by tens of thousands looked upon in like manner as a great loss. For my own part, as probably you know, I have never been able to regard

his political life with complacency. I believe him, however, to have been as disinterested a man, and as true a lover of his country, as it was possible for so ambitious a man to be. His first wish (though probably unknown to himself) was that his country should prosper under his administration; his next that it should prosper. Could the order of these wishes have been reversed, Mr. Pitt would have avoided many of the grievous mistakes into which, I think, he fell.

After this soul-searching admission, in which no doubt remains of his basic unchanging animosity, Wordsworth, like most of his associates, assumed a dignified silence. Those who forsook this recourse only revealed the confusion the crusading careers of their youth had left in their hearts. It is true, to be sure, that real re-evaluation of opinions becomes increasingly difficult as one grows old. It is easier to keep saying, as Samuel Rogers exclaimed years later, "What rulers we had in those days!"

One recurring occasion that was especially jarring to the sensibilities of the old Pittites was the Tory custom of holding an annual dinner in Pitt's memory, with much sentiment, reminiscence, and conviviality. If anything caused writhing among the aging Bonapartists—who, considering later events, had less and less cause to air their former feelings decently—it was such an occasion. The more the guests mourned, the more they ate, said Leigh Hunt, concluding that each item of the menu symbolized "fine qualities of the 'illustrious Statesman':—the fish of his deep research, the fowl of his vigilance, the birds of his excursive genius, the beef of his English vigour, the turtle of his high credit in the City." Yet Hunt's autobiography, published in 1850, while it does not reveal any great admiration, yet expresses a certain sympathy for Pitt as having died "in middle life, of constant ill-success, preying on a sincere but not very large mind, and unwisely supported by a habit of drinking." In effect, Hunt saw, Pitt's fatal malady was a "broken heart." It took the rest of the century for another man of English letters—Thomas Hardy—to admit as much. Even so, one wonders if Pitt himself might not have better understood, and preferred, outright condemnation to the patronizing excuse of "a not very large mind".

The later Romantics, Byron and Shelley, were born too late to share in the fierce anti-Pittite feelings of their elders. As W. L. Renwick points out in *The Oxford History of English Literature*, they had known the hardships of the Napoleonic Wars but not the early years of the Revolution—which, had they been old enough, they would have found as glorious, and Pitt as repressive, as anyone. Having missed the first act of the drama, they could face

the new atmosphere of the nineteenth century with more consistency than could Wordsworth or Coleridge—although, as fate would have it, they did not live in it so long. Byron, in fact, contributed to the fund for Pitt's statue, a memorial to an honoured statesman of the recent past, safely dead and venerable. But Byron's mother, whose memory was longer, chided her son for throwing away his money.

For those not obliged to tuck or to be taciturn, the nineteenth century, with its mellowing perspective on Pitt's career, would have posed no particular problems. Few literary men of Pitt's own time, however, had supported him. Most of those who did were minor figures who might have regarded even second- or third-rank status with aspiration—mere lampoonists whose dubious talents could be bought and sold for the production of a flurry of ephemeral broadsides and short-lived scandal sheets.

Although few contemporary writers who achieved lasting fame had backed Pitt, there was one notable exception: the faithful Scott, chosen as the "personification of magnanimity from all the world's writers" in a recent article by C. P. Snow. It would be pleasant to say that sheer magnanimity and discernment enabled Scott to see in Pitt's career the somber grandeur that had so totally eluded the vision of the Lake Poets. But Scott was a Tory, and the supporters of Pitt, in his lifetime and afterward, were chiefly Tories in name or fact. Two days after Pitt's death, when Scott did not yet know whether or not "that lamentable event" had taken place, his recorded feelings consisted of concern over its probable effect on the progress of his pension through official channels. The Whigs surely would come in, and Scott was uncertain of them. He had friends among the members of the Scottish Opposition, "but", as he put it, "they must provide for the Whiggish children before they throw their bread to the Tory dogs."

Fortunately, this was not the last word on Pitt by one of his most loyal supporters among men of letters. Scott paid Pitt at least three tributes in verse, two of them in songs commissioned for banquets. One of these was composed to celebrate the acquittal of Dundas, then Lord Melville, in his trial for impeachment. The vote to press charges against Melville had been a devastating personal blow to Pitt in his last session of Parliament; he had not lived to see the outcome. The Scottish Tories rejoiced immoderately at the verdict. Scott's ditty, "Health to Lord Melville", was sung at a public dinner, six months after Pitt's death. Pitt, who certainly would have relished the occasion, shared in the acclaim: "Ah! woe!/Weep to his memory;/Low lies the pilot that weathered

the storm!" The last line, from which Pitt never escaped, quoted from the birthday song which Canning—his protégé and eventual successor—wrote for him in 1803, was calculated to bring down the house.

In 1814 Scott composed a more famous ballad, this time Pitt's exclusively. It was written for the anniversary meeting of the Pitt Club of Scotland—one of those "clubs", as Landor said, "expressly formed for the purpose of irrigating this precious plant of immortality with port and claret." For a number of years the Scottish club continued to use Scott's ditty, until its opening lines became widely known:

O, dread was the time, and more dreadful the omen,
 When the brave on Marengo lay slaughtered in vain,
 And beholding broad Europe bowed down by her foemen,
 Pitt closed in his anguish the map of her reign!
 Not the fate of broad Europe could bend his brave spirit
 To take for his country the safety of shame;
 O, then in her triumph remember his merit,
 And hallow the goblet that flows to his name.

This poem shows, more clearly than a chapter of considered prose, the reverence that, years after his death, Pitt inspired among his followers.

Scott's most serious poetic tribute to Pitt was, of course, in the introduction to the first canto of *Marmion*, published in 1808. Deservedly given high praise when it appeared, the passage probably helped bolster English courage as the seemingly endless war dragged out its course. The most striking point about it is the juxtaposition of Pitt and Fox, both of whom had died in 1806, the one after years of power, the other after a few months. Scott is eminently fair to Fox, whom he also admired, and devoted to Pitt: "But search the land, of living men,/Where wilt thou find their like again?" Pitt's patriotism and scorn for personal gain, those qualities that endeared him to thousands, are set forth in stately couplets, telling of

His worth who, in his mightiest hour,
 A bauble held the pride of power,
 Spurned at the sordid lust of pelf,
 And served his Albion for herself.

Pitt's faults, or those of his qualities that are usually so considered, appear quite different in Scott's words. What of terror and repression, for instance? Pitt's dealings with "the frantic crowd" only

O'er their wild mood full conquest gained,
 The pride, he would not crush, restrained,
 Showed their fierce zeal a worthier cause,
 And brought the freeman's arm to aid the freeman's laws.

And as a warrior Pitt takes second place only to Nelson:

Nor mourn ye less his perished worth
 Who bade the conqueror go forth,
 And launched that thunderbolt of war
 On Egypt, Hafnia, Trafalgar.

To find three victories won under Pitt's leadership that fit together into a line of poetry must have been no small task!

The most memorable and eloquent part of the eulogy to Pitt is the metaphorical passage depicting him—not, fortunately, as a pilot—as “A watchman on the lonely tower”, a warning trumpet call, a guiding beacon, a supporting column:

Now is the stately column broke,
 The beacon-light is quenched in smoke,
 The trumpet's silver sound is still,
 The warder silent on the hill!

It is a tribute of which any statesman might be proud. In these lines Scott's natural fair-mindedness emerges. The most unkind remark that Scott ever made about Pitt may have been uttered when he said, with gentleness and on rather flimsy evidence, “He wanted the lofty ideas of his father—you read it in his handwriting, great statesman as he was.” What Scott was acknowledging here—the fact that the Scottish hero Dundas' powerful friend and chief had had shortcomings—was a polite, reluctant conclusion far removed from the glee with which Whig satire had attacked Pitt during his lifetime.

Something about Pitt, perhaps his immense pride and dignity, seemed to inspire jests at his expense. As the nineteenth century advanced, the impulse to deal humorously with him continued, in reaction against his overblown fame in Tory circles. Dickens, in “Household Words”, surrendered to it, with his “talkative barber” who “danced the dance of Mistapit, and sang the song of Mistafoks”. Thackeray yielded most memorably in the portraits in *Vanity Fair* of the Pitt Crawleys, father and son, the latter “named not so much after his father as after the heaven-born minister”.

But satire is not ordinarily so gentle. No reference to the satirical treatment of Pitt can omit mention of Walter Savage Landor. As a contemporary of Southey at Oxford, Landor had been even more radical a Jacobin; and afterwards he was a logical candidate to do writing and reporting for Fox and the Whigs. As restless and independent as Coleridge, but without his universal gifts, Landor, as his biographer Sidney Colvin has said, could be counted on to denounce Pitt but not necessarily to give unreserved admiration to Fox. In the 1820s, with the opinions of his youth unchanged, Landor found a project well suited to his talents: the intermittently continued *Imaginary Conversations*. The "Conversations" between Romilly and Perceval, Louis XVIII and Talleyrand, Alfieri and Salomon, Nesselrode and Nicholas I include anti-Pitt material; but all the charges appear fully developed in the 1829 piece in which Pitt and Canning engage in a dialogue which purports to take place shortly before Pitt's death. He is instructing his chosen successor how best to take his place and reveals unreservedly the secret of his popular success: "Be fluent, and your audience will be over head and ears in love with you. Never stop short, and you will never be doubted. To be out of breath is the only sign of weakness that is generally understood in a chancellor of the exchequer." Landor's indictments of Pitt, like those of the Lake Poets a generation earlier, centre on the hypnotic power of his oratory, which gave him the confidence of the people and therefore the authority to carry out his designs. "Mr. Pitt could speak fluently for hours together, and that was enough: he was permitted to spend a million a week in expeditions."

After Landor's attack on the sorcery of Pitt's speech comes a scornful comment on the incomprehensibility of his reputation. "Although I have failed in every thing I undertook . . . people will consider me after my death as the most extraordinary man of my age." Canning readily learns this part of the lesson. "The worse the condition of the country, the greater is the want of us; the more power we shall possess", he muses—and Pitt approves his pupil's aptitude with the wry comment, "Statesmanlike reflection". Landor makes much, also, of the comparison of the two Pitts, father and son, to the disadvantage of the son, both in natural capacity ("I have none of his wit, little of his wisdom") and in achievement ("He was always thwarted and always succeeded; I was always seconded, and always failed. He left the country flourishing; I leave it impoverished, exhausted, ruined!"). Landor captured, more sympathetically than he intended, the querulous pathos of Pitt's mood during his last months as Prime Minister.

Landor's bitter satire can be amusing, as when Pitt tells Canning that there is no need for a prime minister to lie; others will do it for him, as Dundas did for Pitt. To commit one's own perjury, according to Pitt is "ungentlemanly"; as much so "as to powder your own hair or tie your own shoe-string." Also merry is Pitt's advice for mending matters after a serious blunder: "Talk and look bravely; swear, threaten, bluster; be witty, be pious; sneer, scoff, look infirm, look gouty"—and, almost an obsessive tactic with Pitt, threaten to leave office.

Landor even dared to impugn Pitt's indifference to personal gain, a side of his character which was forcefully presented to the public on his first day as Prime Minister with his celebrated refusal of the lucrative Clerkship of the Polls, and continued to be one of his most effective holds on public opinion. Landor's Pitt counsels Canning to imitate him by supporting himself from the public treasury, meanwhile presenting a façade of absolute integrity to the people "in the simplicity of their hearts." This well might have been the most shattering charge that Landor made, in the view of Pitt's still-loyal followers. A more far-reaching one, perhaps the most original and picturesquely expressed assertion in the whole "Conversation", is that Pitt by errors of policy actually built up the eminence of Napoleon and maintained him in power. If Pitt really "cast in solid gold the clay colossus of France" and "sharpened the sword of Bonaparte and placed the iron crown upon his head", it would have been the most phenomenal achievement of his career. Through Landor's violent comments on Pitt run the threads of the same arguments that were used by Coleridge and Wordsworth, Southey and Hazlitt, and brought again to prominence with Macaulay's classic—and, for a Whig, remarkably unbiased—article of 1859 for the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*. Clearly, for some stubborn men the nineteenth-century spirit of tolerance was merely a betrayal. Had Landor failed to observe that Pitt was making his majestic way towards harmless immortality?

All arguments about Pitt—his character, his actions, his effect on England—depend for ultimate resolution upon a factor which never can be definitive: what went on in his mind; was he sincere? An eminent follower of Pitt in politics and office, and a man of letters in addition, answered this question with a passionate outburst. "Was he sincere?" Disraeli cried, in *Sybil*, of the very issue on which Pitt was most often accused of insincerity—parliamentary reform. "Sincere! Why, he was struggling for his existence!" Although this statement scarcely proves the point, since a man may struggle

by being devious as well as by being straightforward, evidence does point to Pitt's sincerity. His friends never questioned it, his enemies sometimes admitted it, and it was of a piece with the rest of the man, as his contemporaries saw him. Once sincerity is granted, the hard outlines of failure soften. All the world loves a man who honestly fights against immovable obstacles, and that is what Pitt did during much of his career. The Victorian historians gradually eased him into the place in which generations of English schoolboys have found him since: one of the makers of Britain, somewhat betrayed by circumstances (how many other statesmen have had to earn their laurels in competition with Napoleon?) but enjoying a posthumous triumph when, as Bulwer-Lytton put it, "the hand of Wellington accomplished the thought of Pitt."

One enviable quality about Pitt's reputation as it developed in the nineteenth century is that, instead of growing old as other men do, in the minds of many he became younger. When he died early in the century, he had been for some time immensely weary and prematurely aged. Although he was only forty-six, he had been in public office for more than half his lifetime. Moreover, because of his character and upbringing, he never had any youth in the sense of carefree immaturity—a fact with which his enemies charged him as if it were a crime rather than a pity. During the century after his death, however, and particularly after Waterloo was past and the victory that Pitt had planned over and over again had finally materialized, Englishmen came to think of him as the hopeful, phenomenally young minister rather than as the elder statesman worn with defeat. "He was the Chatterton of politics; the 'marvellous boy'", Disraeli wrote in *Sybil*. It is no unpleasant immortality to live on as a young man. The collective nineteenth-century portrait of Pitt is a double one with no suspicion of duplicity, two-headed without being two-faced! The young "heaven-born minister" looks backward to the eighteenth-century greatness of his father, Lord Chatham, and "the pilot that weathered the storm" strains grimly ahead to catch his vision of a world after Napoleon.

From the great Victorian novelists, who had occasion in their three-volume spaciousness to discourse on any topic that struck their fancy, no unanimous portrait of Pitt emerges. Dickens, the ardent humanitarian pleading for social reform, was a natural opponent of the austere minister. He could be casual about this enmity, as in the passing jest already quoted; but he could also take it bitterly, in the spirit of black comedy. It is in this mood that he recalls the old days of Pitt in "The Fine Old English Gentleman", a squib

which he turned out with evident zest during a period of Tory power. The poem repeats the old charges against Pitt, unforgotten in liberal hearts: war abroad and hardship at home, restrictions on the freedom of newspapers and law courts, high taxes, omnipresent spies, conscription, "shutting men of letters up" for expressing their opinions, and harsh punishments for real or imagined treason. The verse rollicks, but it stings:

The good o'd times for cutting throats that cried out in their need,
 The good o'd times for hunting men who held their father's creed,
 The good old times when William Pitt, as all good men agreed,
 Came down direct from Paradise at more than railroad speed
 Oh the fine o'd English Tory times;
 When will they come again!

Thackeray, on the other hand, found Pitt an irresistible subject for ruminations on vanity and the fleeting quality of fame. With his peculiar combination of acid portraiture and nostalgic remembrance Thackeray evoked Pitt's ghost on several occasions. The reader of *The Four Georges* will find a picture of "stately William Pitt stalking on the arm of Dundas" or bending his "stiff neck" to George III, the mad monarch who always had the last word. In *Vanity Fair*, Thackeray sketches not only Pitt but several of his contemporaries in a memorable passage that packs a whole era into a paragraph half looking back with tenderness and half crying "Good riddance!":

Ladies, are you aware that the great Pitt lived in Baker Street? What would not your grandmothers have given to be asked to Lady Hester's parties in that now decayed mansion? I have dined in it—*moi qui vous parle*. I peopled the chamber with ghosts of the mighty dead. As we sat soberly drinking claret there with men of to-day, the spirits of the departed came in and took their places round the darksome board. The pilot who weathered the storm tossed off great bumpers of spiritual port: the shade of Dundas did not leave the ghost of a heel-tap. Addington sat bowing and smirking in a ghastly manner, and would not be behindhand when the noiseless bottle went round; Scott, from under bushy eyebrows, winked at the apparition of beeswing; Wilberforce's eyes went up to the ceiling, so that he did not seem to know how his glass went up full to his mouth and came down empty—up to the ceiling which was above us only yesterday, and which the great of the past days have all looked at. They let the house as a furnished lodging now.

Thus, along with commemorative dinners, laudatory public speeches, and a monument in Westminster Abbey, the nineteenth century brought to

Pitt a measure of literary recognition. It was less than unanimous praise; furthermore, all that is known of Pitt's character indicates that he would have preferred the other forms of tribute. He might, too, have remained conscious that the stubborn, futile splendor of his career had completely escaped most of the literary men of his time. It was that quality that Scott captured in a few lines of quiet strength. Just after the turn of the twentieth century, Hardy achieved a similar dignity with the portrait of Pitt in *The Dynasts*. Here Pitt's words and actions are those, or are modelled on those, recorded in traditional history. The language is matter-of-fact; yet the epic quality is captured, the heroism of "fibre that would rather snap than shrink". In scene after scene Hardy changes the letter of textbooks into the enduring, essential spirit of events. He shows Pitt defending his militia bill in the House of Commons, answering Sheridan's brilliant sarcasms with weary appeals to common sense and to the general confidence in his far-sightedness and integrity. The other members of the Whig Opposition join the attack, with Charles James Fox recalling "the long roll of disputatious years/Wherein we have stood opposed"; but it is Sheridan who cuts the deepest. The Spirit of the Years, one of the Fate-figures that summarize, interpret, and speak for the author, deplores the incessant partisanship that bound these men.

Another memorable episode in the handling of Pitt in *The Dynasts* is his encounter with King George III at a country watering-place. The King begins the interview with a reference to the "strains of office/Which you and I in common have to bear". Conscious of his failing strength, Pitt begs that the Opposition be encouraged to join his administration. He sees an end to the constant stress of party bickering as his only hope of turning present frustration into solid achievement. The King refuses. Pitt starts to argue further, gives it up, looks out of the window and sees on the grounds a stage erected for an entertainment which will include, the King says, "a grinning match through horse-collars—a very humorous sport which I must stay here and witness; for I am interested in whatever entertains my subjects". Pitt's reply is a classic, the whole man in a sentence: "Not one in all the land but knows it, sir."

Several ensuing scenes show Pitt in despair: the one, for example, in which he receives the news of the defeat at Ulm. Then, after Trafalgar, he rides in triumph—his coach pulled by a crowd of well-wishers—to the Lord Mayor's banquet, where he acknowledges public recognition of the best-remembered lines he ever spoke: "England has saved herself, by her exertions: She

will, I trust, save Europe by her example!" The Spirit of the Years, whose duty it is to point out the historical significance of events as they occur—an undertaking beyond mortal powers—seizes on these words, perceiving their place in history and underlining the ephemeral moment when a tradition is born:

Those words of this man Pitt . . . that ring to-night
In their first mintage to the feasters here,
Will spread with ageing, lodge, and crystallize,
And stand embedded in the English tongue
Till it grow thin, outworn, and cease to be.

There is a lesson in recollecting, along with this appraisal of Hardy's, Coleridge's assertion, more than a century earlier, that Pitt never had spoken a memorable word. The case illustrates what the literature of the century following the career of a public figure can reveal that the writing of his own time can not. Perspective, of course, is the difference.

No perspective could change the final facts of failure. Pitt's next great scene in *The Dynasts* is that in which he receives the news of the catastrophic defeat at Austerlitz. The significance of the outcome has been underlined when Napoleon, on the battlefield, surrounded by his natural element of clashing armies, still calls the conflict "a duel 'twixt this Pitt and me". Into the teeth of the terrible news, Pitt throws more immortal words, the object of much marvel after Waterloo because of the accuracy of the prophecy: "Roll up that map. 'Twill not be needed now/These ten years." After this, nothing is left for Pitt but a death-bed scene which is duly played out, reinforcing tradition in its every word. But the Spirit of the Years has a final comment, and with it Pitt's strength and stubborn heroism, the bitter tragedy of writing *failure* across the record of a capable man who well might have succeeded in any circumstances except the ordeal that was his to face, are shown.

Time and time,
When all Earth's light has lain on the nether side,
And yapping midnight winds have leapt on roofs,
And raised for him an evil harlequinade
Of national disasters in long train,
That tortured him with harrowing grimace,
Have I communed with that intelligence.

So the Spirit puts the period to the long sentence. It was a subject congenial to

Hardy's acute sense of the ironies of fate, the twisting and splintering of the square pegs of character in the round holes of circumstance.

Thus the reputation of the younger Pitt passed through the literature of nineteenth-century England. With animosities cooled and politically motivated praises no longer of any use, he emerged into the twentieth century as a great man manqué—a heroic figure out of the past, worthy of remembrance but never to be free of the stigma of defeat. In dealing with Nelson and Wellington, history forgets the failures and uncertainties and recalls only the triumphs; with Pitt, whose victories were those of finance and legislation rather than of cannon and warship, the failures were more spectacular and have remained longer in the public, and literary, imagination.

MORNING SMOKE

Bill Howell

Sitting on differences,
smoke and blue sky day clouds, almost
lost in white, feet too
lazy for walking.

Handing out hellos, like apples
to good little children, to friendly
neighbourly folks, munching by on shared smiles,
almost like friendly neighbours.

Staring at the stupid smoke, curling
the same way if it's from a first
cigarette from a new pack, or a spare
almost second last one from the last.

Wondering what would happen to the sky,
the smiles, if someone strolls along, asks
the day and you if you have another
smoke or apple.