Hazlitt on Identity: The Inveterate Self and Social Change

I

In this essay I wish to focus on Hazlitt's ideologically astute sense of the role that custom and habit play in our sense of self. In his various writings about identity there is a recurrent concern for the recalcitrant workings of the self and a profound understanding of how this might stand in the way of social change. Hazlitt's work provides a sustained insight into this less creative aspect of the Romantic period self. His writing is at times peculiarly attentive to the inverse of the celebrated Romantic tendency to champion the power of self-consciousness. His enquiries into the self often lead him into those areas of custom and habit where such awareness is notable for its absence. For obvious reasons, we have come to think of writers from this period as the providers of epiphanies of self-consciousness whereas what I wish to engage with here are Hazlitt's representations of the self which are concerned with various kinds of limit and which often have a tendency to show our habitual and even characteristic lack of psychological insight or even our incapacity for profound self-realization. As he puts it in 'On the Knowledge of Character': 'For the most part, we are stunned and stupid in judging of ourselves' (viii; 316)[1] and, in the same essay, 'A man's whole life may be a lie to himself and others' (viii, 303). Even the more famous strand of Hazlitt's thinking – about the workings of genius – contains this idea of unconscious ignorance: 'The works of the greatest genius are produced almost unconsciously, with an ignorance on the part of the persons themselves that they have done any thing extraordinary. Nature has done it for them' (viii, 316). These representations of limit and incapacity in our understanding of ourselves are important for appreciating Hazlitt's wider role as a social and political commentator. In his enquiry into the paradoxical argument of the Political Essays of 1819, Paul Hamilton has described Hazlitt's 'battle' for 'the good old cause' against superstitions, prejudices, traditions, laws, usages which are "enshrined in the very idioms of language"'.[2] My attention here is on the psychological equivalents. Here Hazlitt attempts to get the measure of the psychological underpinning to the ideology he experiences and opposes as a citizen and a critic.

For many of his critics, the locus classicus of Hazlitt's representation of the self is his 1805 philosophical treatise An Essay on the Principles of Human Action which takes as its *raison d'*étre the limit of our selfishness. As A.C. Grayling and others have pointed out,[3] Hazlitt's optimistic project here early in his career was to find the redemptive capacity in the sympathetic imagination which might allow us to escape from the moral confinement of our self-interest. He does so

by focusing on the way in which we can only envisage our future self – since it does not yet exist – through an act of imagination. His further assertion is that this act is exactly the same as sympathizing with another person.[4] It is an argument he takes up and deploys more generally against both utilitarianism and the Malthusian thesis on population.[5] At the other end of the spectrum to his closely argued work of philosophy which constitutes his 1805 Essay is Liber Amoris – a formally experimental autobiography comprising closet drama, prose narrative, extensive quotation, epistolary correspondence, and intimate memoir in which the passion of love is shown to radically transform the self.[6] If these two dramatically different texts have understandably played a key part in defining our sense of Hazlitt's exploration of identity, they don't tell the whole story of his wrestling with the difficulty of the self's relationship to social change and to ideology. Liber Amoris charts the disturbing metamorphosis of the self under the influence of passion or imagination and is radically ambivalent as to whether this constitutes success or failure, while the 1805 Essay finds a positive solution to the logic of our capacity to imagine our future selves. In what follows I wish to examine Hazlitt's exploration of the less spectacular and darker territory of the inveterate self, an enquiry which leads him to an appreciation of how we very often work according to prejudices and habits which militate against transformation either in the self or in the larger frame of society. A.C. Grayling touches briefly on the challenge posed by this aspect of Hazlitt's writing evident in what he refers to as the 'pessimistic and dispirited moral tone of his Plain Speaker essays'.[7] Grayling is keenly aware of the threat offered by these writings to Hazlitt's thesis on our inherent disinterestedness and our 'natural benevolence'.[8] The extent of Hazlitt's enquiry, as we shall see, extends well beyond that famous volume and across the next decade.F While there are undoubted elements of personal disappointment as well as pessimism informing these various essays, I would like to focus on their political implication, particularly their contribution to social critique. Kevin Gilmartin has suggested that a 'committed historical progressivism was central to Hazlitt's radical expression, though … even in the social and political sphere, progress was subject to troubling reversals and countervailing forces'.[9] These resistant aspects of character and identity constitute a one of these 'countervailing forces', playing as they do a key role in supporting and maintaining the prevailing ideology. For Hazlitt the disappointed radical and the disappointed lover, one might say they represent the biggest challenge of all. They constitute the basis of human behaviour which works unconsciously against the prospect of social transformation.

II

In his essay 'On Personal Character', first published in The London Magazine in 1821, Hazlitt articulates what is perhaps one of his most pessimistic statements about our capacity for change. His epigraph from Montaigne establishes the tone for what follows: ‘Men palliate and conceal their original qualities, but do not extirpate them’ (xii, 230). Beginning unapologetically and somewhat surprisingly with reference to novels as ‘repositories of the natural history and philosophy of the species’ and with Henry Fielding’s characters Master Blifil and Tom Jones as his examples (though, revealingly, the tenor of the essay leans towards the former as the more pertinent example), he takes up the recently published German phrenologists Franz Joseph Gall (1758-1828) and Johann Gaspar Spurzheim (1776-1832) and extends their study of ‘essential difference of character’ into what he considers to be the wider domain of ‘character’. This includes his reference not just to family physical resemblance, but to the sharing of the same emotional characteristics: ‘the same turn of mind and sentiments, the same foibles, peculiarities, faults, follies, misfortunes, consolations, the same self, the same everything!’ (xii, 233). And Hazlitt extends this view by reference to hitherto separated family members who find themselves mirrored in the faces and emotional responses of their long-lost relatives (xii, 233). The explanation he provides is that ‘the stuff of which our blood and humours are compounded [is] the same’ (xii, 233). This in turn leads him on to the view that ‘the colour of our lives is woven into the fatal thread at our births: our original sins, and our redeeming graces are infused into us … nor is the bond, that confirms our destiny, ever cancelled’ (xii, 233). Similarly, later on in the essay, he asserts that ‘The disease is in the blood: you may see it (if you are a curious observer) meandering in their veins, and reposing on his eye-lids! Some of our foibles are laid in the constitution of our bodies; others in the structure of our minds, and both are irremediable’ (xii, 237-38).

As he pushes on with this rather fatalistic, biological line of argument, it is perhaps unsurprising that he adverts to race and species in dangerous proximity: ‘Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots?’ (xii, 240). This essentialist and reactionary perspective on the individual leads Hazlitt into a disappointed view of the current political situation. One can see at this point in his writing a strong correlation between the two things. His representation of the self mirrors his view of social change. After deciding that ‘[i]n truth, almost all the characters of Hogarth are of the class of incorrigibles’, Hazlitt ‘wonders what has become of some of them’ (xii, 240) and speculates that they must still be present in his own contemporary society, having not been ‘swept away, like locusts, in the whirlwind of the French Revolution’, though he admits that some

may have been ‘modernised a little’ (xii, 240). This leads him to a more general statement about the abiding pretence of social reality which returns us to the epigraph from Montaigne: ‘We may refine, we may disguise, we may equivocate, we may compound for our vices, without getting rid of them’; and on this basis, he concludes that ‘we may, in this respect, look forward to a decent and moderate, rather than a thorough and radical reform’ (xii, 241). On this pessimistic premise he ventures a more generalized view on the prospect of social change. Even when in his personal disappointment Hazlitt writes about the culture of his contemporary society as if it is a deceit played out by human actors, this sense of a prevailing sham is at one with his propensity for ideological critique. The perspective he offers at such moments is clearly that of the disappointed revolutionary.

As the essay moves towards its conclusion, Hazlitt at least realises how far his subscription here to a model of the self as inveterate and unchanging – and one which has its seeds in our infancy – pushes him towards a reactionary position not just in the political field but in the theological or metaphysical realm. There is some hint of regret and perhaps even a sly or arch self-consciousness as he finds himself in alignment with the Calvinist position of predestined election and original sin. Attracted as he is to a drama of negative instincts and corrosive forces within the self in this essay, he even re-writes the Wordsworthian maxim in ‘Ode: Intimations of Immortality’ that 'the child is father to the man', and turns it from its potentially subversive psychologically revelatory potential into a kind of fatalism:

> Can we doubt that the character and thoughts have remained as much the same all that time; have borne the same image and superscription; have grown with the growth, and strengthened with the strength? In this sense, and in Mr Wordsworth’s phrase, ‘the child’s the father of the man’ surely enough. (xii, 231)

The dejected and disappointed tone of the essay leads him into a melancholic withdrawal from social interaction, albeit one which is positively disposed in its isolated self-improvement and in its toleration of personal differences. The admission at the end that he has been led down a potentially dangerous line of thought is at least heartening, as is his reminder of his capacity for a lively contrariness – his agreeing with a ‘salvo’ or caveat:

> I do not know any moral to be deduced from this view of the subject but one, namely, that we should mind our own business, cultivate our good qualities, if we have any, and irritate ourselves less about the absurdities of other people, which neither we nor they can help. I grant there is something in what I have said, which might be made to glance

> towards the doctrines of original sin, grace, and election, reprobation, or the Gnostic principle that acts did not determine the virtue or vice of the character; and in those doctrines, so far as they are deducible from what I have said, I agree – but always with a salvo. (xii, 241)

Spurred on by his recent engagement with the German phrenologists, Hazlitt is at least willing to engage with some of the challenges of the new psychology and to test out how its suppositions might stand in the way of reform. In his thorough-going enquiry into 'character', F he is willing to entertain and even allow for those aspects in the constitution of the self which might doggedly resist improvement.

Hazlitt continued his anguished investigation into 'character' in an essay published in Table Talk in 1822, entitled 'On the Knowledge of Character'. Perhaps the most interesting aspect of this piece is his repeated admission that such knowledge is difficult to obtain. There is a strong sense here of the melancholy view that we must remain forever strangers to ourselves and to our closest associates. The splenetic force of the essay manifests itself an extraordinarily negative depiction of the relationship between friends, family, lovers, the sexes, and even the different social classes. In particular, it produces some of his most unattractive commentaries on women and of the uneducated lower classes. His focus is once again on the nature of prejudice and social hypocrisy and this leads him into a consideration of the inveterate and fixed nature of character and from there into some rather challenging views of love-at-first-sight and on physical appearance – 'first impressions' as the true judge of people's characters:

> There are various ways of getting at a knowledge of character – by looks, words, actions. The first of these, which seems the most superficial, is perhaps the safest, and least liable to deceive: nay, it is that which mankind, in spite of their pretending to the contrary, are generally governed by. (viii, 303)

> This sort of prima facie evidence, then, shows what a man is, better than what he says or does; for it shows us the habit of his mind, which is the same under all circumstances and disguises. (viii, 304)

Once again, in this continued engagement with the idea of character, Hazlitt finds himself subscribing to views of the self and also to views of society which are profoundly unprogressive. Admittedly, there is something of a performance here in his own writing – what one might describe as a self-flagellating realisation of falling in with the wrong side in the debate about our selves and,

as a consequence, destroying the prospect of achieving both personal and social change. Assessing this unattractive side of Hazlitt in the fraught context of Liber Amoris, Gregory Dart has suggested that this essay might be construed as containing ‘a note of self-conscious exaggeration'[10] and he describes it as 'designedly irascible in places'. I would concur with his perception that Hazlitt ‘the disappointed idealist’ might here 'be deliberately seeking to redress a previous imbalance'. It can certainly be seen as part of a more wide-ranging and concerted attack in Hazlitt’s writing on customary or habitual assumptions. At the very least there is some mischievous relish in challenging expectations and in turning the tables on polite liberal assumptions as to the nature of identity. There is also something refreshing – perhaps even invigorating – about experiencing an inverse or reverse view of things. Hazlitt the provocative essayist looks to disturb the surety or complacency of his reader in contrast to the philosopher of the 1805 Essay who is more intent on establishing the consistency of his argument on our natural disinterestedness.

Hazlitt’s lashing out against the culture of the author and of literary celebrity here prepares the ground for an extraordinary conjuring of the self according to these peculiarly negative perceptions. There is perhaps a democratic principle of returning hallowed authors back to the domain of ordinary even dull uninteresting people in this manoeuvre, but it is more noteworthy for its emptying-out through inversion of the identity of the writer – a particularly painful iconoclasm if we think of how ‘My First Acquaintance with Poets’ offers its own more reserved iconoclastic revision of his former poetic idols. In a dramatic, even melodramatic, passage Hazlitt presents an apparently anonymous figure who, as he gains definition, comes close to being autobiographical, before drawing the reader into the very fabric of the essay and then deflecting away again with a swerve towards Coleridge – here represented by ‘C--------. The very movement of this passage captures something distinctive about the nature of Hazlitt’s negative definition of identity, its deceptive movement, its substitutive capacity, and its painful recognition of anonymity. This is far from the idea of prized self-consciousness based on self-autonomy or a higher level perception leading to self-realization and it is pointedly directed at an iconic, lionized representative at the heart of that literary culture:

> You say, there is Mr --------, undoubtedly a person of great genius: yet, except when excited by something extraordinary, he seems half dead. He has wit at will, yet wants life and spirit. He is capable of the most generous acts, yet meanness seems to cling to every motion. He looks like a poor creature – and in truth he is one! The first impression he gives you of him answers nearly to the feeling he has of his personal

> identity; and this image of himself, rising from his thoughts, and shrouding his faculties, is that which sits with him in the house, walks out with him into the street, and haunts his bedside. The best part of his existence is dull, cloudy, leaden: the flashes of light that proceed from it, or streak it here and there, may dazzle others, but do not deceive himself. Modesty is the lowest of the virtues, and is a real confession of the deficiency it indicates. He who undervalues himself is justly undervalued by others. Whatever good properties he may possess are, in fact, neutralised by a 'cold rheum' running through his veins, and taking away the zest of his pretensions, the pith and marrow of his performances. What is it to me that I can write these TABLETALKS? It is true I can, by a reluctant effort, rake up a parcel of half-forgotten observations, but they do not float on the surface of my mind, nor stir it with any sense of pleasure, nor even of pride. Others have more property in them than I have: they may reap the benefit, I have only the pain. Otherwise, they are to me as if they had never existed: nor should I know that I had ever thought at all, but that I am reminded of it by the strangeness of my appearance, and my unfitness for every thing else. Look in C[oleridge]'s face while he is talking. His words are such as might 'create a soul under the ribs of death.' His face is a blank. Which are we to consider as the true index of his mind? Pain, languor, shadowy remembrances are the uneasy inmates there: his lips move mechanically! (viii, 304-05)

The premise underlying Hazlitt's acerbic commentaries in 'On the Knowledge of Character' is that the culture he inhabits is a fraud, a deceit – particularly the literary culture we inhabit – and that the identity of the author within it has been drained of vitality so as to become a disturbing phantom.[11] This is a view which he expresses in various forms in the period following his disastrous attempt at a relationship with Sarah Walker. It features strongly in a number of his Table Talk essays and in the various writings related to Liber Amoris, including 'The Fight' and 'On the Conduct of Life; or, Advice to a Schoolboy'.[12] In the original letters which went to form the latter we are informed that authors 'feel nothing spontaneously. The common incidents and circumstances of life with which others are taken up, make no alteration in them … Nothing stirs their blood or accelerates their juices or tickles their veins …Their minds are a sort of Herculaneum, full of old petrified images;— are set in stereotype, and little fitted to the ordinary occasions of life'.[13]

Here, it produces a strongly fatalistic sense of identity and an excoriating attack on the identity of the literary author. In this particular essay one of the

most shocking assertions for literary scholars is Hazlitt's claim regarding the work of John Donne: 'I have a higher idea of Donne from a rude, half-effaced outline of him prefixed to his poems than from any thing he ever wrote' (viii, 304).

If the extremity of Hazlitt's essay contemplates the destruction of the very poetic culture he helped to canonize, it also has the capacity to illustrate the force of its case by reference to another scene of annihilation. One of the most interesting passages in this essay is its consideration of the self in relation to what Hazlitt refers to as the 'abstract idea of a murderer'. It is another example of his defining the self in extremis. It presents a characteristically Hazlittean reflection on the nature of the self – one of his many powerful recognitions of the way in which the self is defined through limit and, at the same time, through its powerful instinct for self-preservation. This doubling up so as to provide a revelatory recoil back into the self takes the following form:

> In my opinion, no man ever answered in his own (except in the agonies of conscience or of repentance, in which latter case he throws the imputation from himself in another way) to the abstract idea of a murderer. He may have killed a man in self-defence, or 'in the trade of war', or to save himself from starving, or in revenge for an injury, but always 'so as with a difference', or from mixed and questionable motives. The individual, in reckoning with himself, always takes into the account the considerations of time, place, and circumstance, and never makes out a case of unmitigated, unprovoked villany, of 'pure defecated evil' against himself … So there is a story of a fellow who, as he was writing down his confession of a murder, stopped to ask how the word murder was spelt; this, if true, was partly because his imagination was staggered by the recollection of the thing, and partly because he shrunk from the verbal admission of it. (viii, 314)

This is a fascinating pre-Freudian moment of eruption in writing or rather a moment of the impasse or break-down in the perception of writing where the self's selfishness leads to its refusal to be translated or placed in the category of the guilty or the condemned.

Hazlitt's 1828 essay 'On Personal Identity' offers further demonstration of his definition of identity by pushing it to its limit – in this case its refusal, on the grounds of self-preservation and self-value, to engage in precisely those flights of metamorphosis and empathy which we have come to identify with Romantic creativity. It begins with that commonplace trope in the popular imagination – that of substituting one's self for someone more favourably circumstanced. It is

articulated with the help of Pliny's example of Diogenes and Alexander and, importantly, it is accompanied by a reminder that this manoeuvre for Hazlitt – and, he would have it, for all of us – is a point of extremity. It is an example which serves to demonstrate his definition of identity by pushing at its limit. Such a substitution represents 'the utmost point at which our admiration or envy ever arrives':

> 'If I were not Alexander, I would be Diogenes!' said the Macedonian hero; and the cynic might have retorted the compliment upon the prince by saying, that, 'were he not Diogenes, he would be Alexander!' This is the universal exception, the invariable reservation that our self-love makes, the utmost point at which our admiration or envy ever arrives – to wish, if we were not ourselves, to be some other individual. No one ever wishes to be another, instead of himself. We may feel a desire to change places with others – to have one man's fortune – another's health or strength – his wit or learning, or accomplishments of various kinds — [..] but we would still be our selves, to possess and enjoy all these, or we would not give a doit for them. (xvii, 264)

This movement from Diogenes to a doit – from an extravagant gesture towards Classical renown to an almost worthless coin embedded in common parlance signals the brake on mobility in Hazlitt's thinking. We come to a characteristically material, tangible, and idiomatically expressed stop in the form of this persuasive resistance to exchange.

Hazlitt's next example in this essay drives home his point about extremity and offers us a sharpened definition of the self. The value placed on our sense of identity, he suggests, is greater than that between the poorest and the richest in his society. A beggar might imagine being in possession of all the finery, pomp, and wealth of a king, but he does so, Hazlitt claims, only in so far as the comparison is with himself and not instead of himself:

> If the meanest beggar who crouches at a palace-gate, and looks up with awe and suppliant fear to the proud inmate as he passes, could be put in possession of all this finery, the pomp, the luxury, and wealth that he sees and envies on the sole condition of getting rid, together with his rags and misery, of all recollection that there ever was such a wretch as himself, he would reject that proffered boon with scorn. He might be glad to change situations; but he would insist on keeping his own thoughts, to compare notes, and point the transition by the force of contrast. He would not, on any account, forego his self-congratulation on the unexpected accession of good fortune, and his escape from past suffering. All that excites his cupidity, his envy, his repining or despair,

> is the alternative of some great good to himself; and if, in order to attain that object, he is to part with his own existence to take that of another, he can feel no farther interest in it. (xvii, 265)

Once again Hazlitt's philosophical point is driven home with a demotic illustration of self-conscious autonomy: 'he would insist on keeping his own thoughts, to compare notes'.

Just how much such a substitution is – in Hazlitt's view – the very limit, or the ne plus ultra of our capacity to imagine ourselves – or, rather, our incapacity to imagine or act in furtherance of the extinction of ourselves – is clinched in his next comparison where he offers his own interpretation of ancient Greek mythology. This is a pointedly humanist rendering of Classical culture. For Hazlitt, the various famous transformations in that mythology are construed as consolations in the face of our annihilation:

> It is an instance of the truth and beauty of the ancient mythology, that the various transmutations it recounts are never voluntary, or of favourable omen, but are interposed as a timely release to those who, driven on by fate, and urged to the last extremity of fear or anguish, are turned into a flower, a plant, an animal, a star, a precious stone, or into some object that may inspire pity or mitigate our regret for their misfortunes. Narcissus was transformed into a flower; Daphne into a laurel; Arethusa into a fountain (by the favour of the gods) – but not until no other remedy was left for their despair. It is a sort of smiling cheat upon death, and graceful compromise with annihilation. It is better to exist by proxy, in some softened type and soothing allegory, than not at all – to breathe in a flower or shine in a constellation, than to be utterly forgot; but no one would change his natural condition (if he could help it) for that of a bird, an insect, a beast, or a fish, however delightful their mode of existence, or however enviable he might deem their lot compared to his own. Their thoughts are not our thoughts – their happiness is not our happiness; nor can we enter into it except with a passing smile of approbation, or as a refinement of fancy… (xvii, 265-6)

Here, Hazlitt relegates metamorphosis to a form of consolation. Given his focus on the primacy and irreducibility of personal identity he does not thrill as John Keats so famously did sometimes in his letters and in his poems to the prospect of projective imaginative empathy. To be translated into the form and being of another creature is anathema to Hazlitt. In his view, to take part in the existence of a bird, insect, beast, or a fish is very much a last resort rather than a longed-for imaginative transformation. Here Hazlitt seems intensely aware – and wants

his readers to be acutely aware – of the prospect of human separateness and wishes his homology of the self to include that kind of absolute difference which only the relatively new knowledge of natural history in the form of Linnean classification can assign to the idea of a 'species'. His description of Classical transformations as 'a sort of smiling cheat upon death, and graceful compromise with annihilation' foregrounds a paradox in which the aesthetic is a secondary and fanciful order of things, the self, primary and absolute.

III

These essays on character and identity spanning the 1820s are representative of a sustained strand in Hazlitt's writing. They might easily be read as symptoms of his melancholia or indeed his splenetic response to his deep-seated unhappiness at this point in his personal life. They might also be seen to be at odds with the moral conclusion of our capacity for disinterestedness or benevolence reached in the 1805 Essay. But they are, I would argue, consistent with Hazlitt's thorough-going exploration of both the social and the personal or psychological character of his time, one which leads him into some dangerous territories, particularly for a liberal thinker committed to wider social change. Understanding precisely what it was which motivated and engaged people through opinion, habit, and even prejudice was a key requirement for a cultural commentator like Hazlitt. Only then might one fully appreciate how ideology functioned. The very workings and the limits to social change might be found by attempting to identify those aspects of the self which might resist all pushes towards transformation.

Hazlitt's achievement in the 1805 Essay on the Principles of Human Action lay, as we have seen, in establishing a credible counter to the supposed inherent selfishness of our human nature. Against the more generally proclaimed tendency of his age's engagement in acts of the sympathetic imagination which are deemed to be the precursors to our own contemporary culture's celebration of empathy, Hazlitt's repeated ground is the limit of our selves and even more, I would argue, the capacity we have in moments of crisis or challenge to fall back into our selfishness and into the reactionary descriptions of character which support it. It is the spectre of this backsliding which acts as a spur to much of Hazlitt's writing about identity and the self, just as in his related political reflections he is assiduous in imagining a return to monarchy post-Waterloo and is equally vehement in his rejection of Malthus's argument about population. In all cases, the offence offered to our human nature is its reduced status as a result of defining it by our animal nature whether through the idea of heredity in

monarchy, or its capacity for sexual reproduction in the case of Malthus, or indeed by reference to its fixed and instinctive self-preservation in the case of selfishness. In this respect, I would argue, the effort involved in the proclaimed philosophical achievement of his 1805 Essay was something which in Hazlitt's view demanded to be repeated throughout his career. In terms of the self, then, as much as for 'legitimacy', his writing might be described as being on permanent watch for the return of the enemy.

Hazlitt's profound recognition of the power of custom and his recognition of habit and 'prejudices … transmitted like instincts' (viii, 313) can make him appear at times anything but the enlightened rationalist philosopher in search of a disinterested truth or even the committed republican rooting out the threats to reform. In pursuit of the power of habit he is in danger of not just recognising its force, but of endorsing it with his essentialist views of the self. At the same time, Hazlitt's concerted attempts to account for the hold of habit on our minds and on our behaviours provides a valuable insight into its role in society – and particularly its tendency to militate against both social and psychological change. If this sometimes exposes the unattractive underside to Hazlitt's acute ideological awareness, he is, I would argue, the writer in the second decade of the nineteenth century who is the most profoundly aware of the ideological workings of power in the popular mind and in the culture at large. He is particularly alert to its capacity to reconstitute itself out of the ruins of reform and the failed prospect of a republic in the example of Revolutionary France. This is why – post-Waterloo and post-Napoleon – he so frequently cries out against the almost spectral figure of 'the hag, Legitimacy'[14] – aware as he is of monarchy's capacity to silently and insidiously creep back into life at every opportunity, to take nourishment and grow from the smallest seed. In his engagement with habit, prejudice, and 'small things', Hazlitt maintains his passionate commentary on the workings of psychology and power.[15] As he expresses it in The Life of Napoleon Buonaparte when contemplating the Inquisition in Italy: 'The whole science and study of social improvement may be reduced to watching the secret aim and rooted purpose of power, and in opposing it step by step and in exact proportion to the obstinacy of its struggles for existence' (xiii, 263). Hazlitt's articulation of the spectral power of monarchy and its capacity to renew itself from the smallest relics of its ruination remains a pertinent insight into the workings of ideology. In ascribing to monarchical legitimacy the identity of a 'spirit' he also alerts us to our susceptibility to the customary imagination and the powerful part it can play in the process of familiarizing and thus naturalizing the forces of oppression.

[1] All quotations from Hazlitt are taken from The Complete Works of William Hazlitt, ed. P.P. Howe, 21 vols (London: J.M. Dent, 1930-4). References are by volume and page.

[2] See Paul Hamilton, 'Paradoxical Argument: Hazlitt's Political Essays of 1819', The Hazlitt Review, 4 (2011), 33.

[3] See A.C. Grayling, The Quarrel of the Age: The Life and Times of William Hazlitt (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 2000), esp. 362-5 and "'A nature towards one another': Hazlitt and the Inherent Disinterestedness of Moral Agency'" in Metaphysical Hazlitt: Bicentenary Essays ed. Uttara Natarajan, Tom Paulin, and Duncan Wu (London and New York: Routledge, 2005)151-9; David Bromwich, 'Disinterested Imagining and Impersonal Feeling', in Metaphysical Hazlitt, 17-29.

[4] See A.C. Grayling "'A nature towards one another': Hazlitt and the Inherent Disinterestedness of Moral Agency'", in Metaphysical Hazlitt, 150-9.

[5] See Stephen Burley, Hazlitt the Dissenter: Religion, Philosophy, and Politics 1766-1816 (Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014) 148-60; John Whale, 'Hazlitt and the Selfishness of Passion', in Metaphysical Hazlitt, 56-60.

[6] See Jon Cook, Hazlitt in Love: A Fatal Attachment, (London: Short Books,2007); Sonia Hofkosh, 'Broken Images', Nineteenth-Century Prose 36:1 (Spring 2009) 27-54; John Barnard, *Hazlitt's Liber Amoris; or the New* Pygmalion (1823): Conversations and the Statue', in Translating Life: Studies in Transpositional Aesthetics ed. Shirley Chew and Alistair Stead (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1999) 181-98; Robert Ready, 'The Logic of Passion: Hazlitt's Liber Amoris, Studies in Romanticism 14 (1984), 209-25; John Whale, 'Liber Amoris: Unmanning the Man of Letters', Nineteenth-Century Prose 36:1 (Spring 2009), 55-76.

[7] See A.C. Grayling, "'A nature towards one another': Hazlitt and the Inherent Disinterestedness of Moral Agency'", in Metaphysical Hazlitt, 151-4.

[8] Ibid. 151.

[9] Kevin Gilmartin, William Hazlitt: Political Essayist (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 310.

[10] Gregory Dart, William Hazlitt: Liber Amoris and Other Writings, (Manchester: Fyfield Books/Carcanet, 2008), 163.

[11] In 'On the Aristocracy of Letters' Hazlitt laments: 'There is not a more helpless or more despised animal than a mere author, without any extrinsic advantages of birth, breeding, or fortune to set him off' (viii, 210) while in 'On the Disadvantages of Intellectual Superiority' he claims: 'We speak another language, have notions of our own, and are treated as of a different species' (viii, 280) while his worry about inhabiting a sham culture is evident in statement in 'On the Disadvantages of Intellectual Superiority' that: 'One of the miseries of intellectual pretensions is, that nine-tenths of those you come into contact with do not know whether you are an impostor or not' and his extension of the idea in 'On Patronage and Puffing' that 'Life itself is a piece of harmless quackery' (viii, 298).

[12] See 'On the Disadvantages of Intellectual Superiority', 'On Patronage and Puffing', and 'On the Aristocracy of Letters', (viii, 279-288; 289-303; 205-214.

[13] The Letters of William Hazlitt, Herschel Moreland Sikes, Willard Hallam Bonner and Gerald Lahey (eds), (New York: Macmillan, 1978), 233-4.

[14] Hazlitt uses the phrase in 'Mr Coleridge' in The Spirit of the Age: 'Liberty (the philosopher's and the poet's bride) had fallen a victim, meanwhile, to the murderous practices of the hag, Legitimacy' (11, 34). He offers an extended description of the relationship between liberty and legitimacy in the 'Preface' to Political Essays, with Sketches of Public Characters (1819), vii, 9-11.

[15] For analyses of Hazlitt's attacks on 'legitimacy' see Kevin Gilmartin, William Hazlitt: Political Essayist, 107-21; Simon Bainbridge Napoleon and English Romanticism (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 192; Philip Harling, 'William Hazlitt and Radical Journalism', Romanticism 3 (1997), 54; Stuart Semmel, 'British Radicals and "Legitimacy": Napoleon in the Mirror of History', Past & Present, 167 (May 2000), 140-75.