

The Charles Lamb Bulletin

The Journal of the Charles Lamb Society

October 2008
New Series No. 144

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Lamb's London, Lamb's Magazines and Nostalgia in the Present Tense

By DAVID G. STEWART

'And what else but an accumulation of sights – endless sights – *is* a great city; or for what else is it desirable?'

– Charles Lamb, 'A Complaint of the Decay of Beggars in the Metropolis'

THAT LAMB WAS GIVEN TO A NOSTALGIC DISREGARD FOR THE PRESENT in favour of a longing backward glance at the past seems indisputable. It was this tendency that first allowed critics to claim for his essays a formal aesthetic unity,¹ and for more recent critics to claim that his work was part of a project of Romantic political escapism.² Yet another Elian verity sits oddly with this 'escapist' tendency: his passionate attachment to the modern metropolis. Lamb found his own 'radical difference' from Wordsworth in precisely this: the dirty, degraded, perpetually moving vision of 'sights – endless sights' that Lamb discovered in London was just what Wordsworth could not countenance, and Lamb took a certain malicious glee in provoking the Poet of Nature with professions of an abhorrence of nature in favour of the metropolis. By looking first at Lamb's response to London, in contrast to Wordsworth's, I hope to identify in his metropolitan vision a vital aspect of all of Lamb's essays. His is a very modern world of movement and change, where the present moment insists upon its presence; and this tendency, I will argue, is of a piece with his nostalgia. Recent work has sought to put Lamb back into his magazine context,³ and my argument will similarly focus on Lamb's conception of the place of his own writing in this publishing context. What I will suggest is that Lamb's un-Wordsworthian appreciation of the present world of flux and change allows him to make out of his nostalgia not escapism, but elegy. Wordsworth and many of Lamb's contemporaries, as Andrew Bennett has argued,⁴ write in anticipation of posterity's reward for contemporary neglect, but for Lamb as a magazine writer the imagined future is one that leaves no trace of his existence. His nostalgia is for a past that has already begun to disappear; and his elegy for London's sights and sounds is also an elegy for himself.

¹ Donald H. Reiman, 'Thematic Unity in Lamb's Familiar Essays', *Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 64 (1965): 470-8, and Richard Haven, 'The Romantic Art of Charles Lamb', *English Literary History* 30 (1963): 137-46.

² Mark Parker, *Literary Magazines and British Romanticism* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2000): 30-56.

³ Notably, Parker (2000). Peter Manning bucks the trend, seeing Lamb's essays as deliberately 'detaching' themselves from their magazine context; 'Detaching Lamb's Thoughts', *Romantic Periodicals and Print Culture*, ed. Kim Wheatley (London: Frank Cass, 2003): 137-46.

⁴ Andrew Bennett, *Romantic Poets and the Culture of Posterity* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1999).

⁵ '1805' *Prelude* in *The Prelude 1799, 1805, 1850*, eds. Jonathon Wordsworth, M.H. Abrams and Stephen Gill (London: W.W. Norton and Company, 1979); hereafter: (*P*).

⁶ Lucy Newlyn, "'In city pent': Echo and Allusion in Wordsworth, Coleridge and Lamb, 1797-1801", *Review of English Studies* n.s. 32 (1981): 428. Judith Fish has recently argued that Lamb's city experience is part of a critique of Wordsworth, Coleridge and the picturesque tradition: see "'A merry Season to us all, & auspicious New Year to our London': Charles Lamb and the Representations of a City", *Charles Lamb Bulletin* n.s. 125 (January 2004): 2-9.

⁷ William Galperin's *The Return of the Visible in British Romanticism* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1993) argues for Wordsworth's fear of all things visual, immediate and modern.

⁸ William Hazlitt, *The Complete Works of William Hazlitt*, ed. P.P. Howe, 21 vols. (London: J.M. Dent, 1930-4): 11, 181; hereafter: (*H*).

⁹ For example: 'Sun and sky, and breeze, and solitary walks, and summer holidays, and the greenness of fields ... do these things go out with life?', 'New Year's Eve', *Elia* 1823 (Menston: The Scholar Press Limited, 1969): 67; hereafter: (*E*).

¹⁰ See the letters to Wordsworth of 29th November 1800, 30th January 1801, to Lloyd 7th February 1801, and to Manning 27th February 1801 and 15th February 1802, which includes a draft of the 'Londoner' essay. *The Complete Letters of Charles & Mary Lamb* ed. EV Lucas, 3 vols. (London: JM Dent and Sons, 1935); hereafter: (*LL*).

¹¹ Stephen Gill, *William Wordsworth: A Life* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1989): 210: 'Wordsworth could be moved by London ... but what always affected him was the city's potential for beauty brought out by the dawn light or a

transfiguring snowstorm. Lamb, by contrast, was passionately in love with the actual’.

¹² De Quincey intriguingly argues of Lamb’s fondness for nonsense and humour: ‘things of that nature better illustrate the *realities* of Lamb’s social life than the gravities weighing so sadly on his solitary hours he sought to banish from his moment of relaxation’. ‘Final Memorials of Charles Lamb’, *The Works of Thomas De Quincey*, gen. ed. Grevel Lindop, 21 vols. (London: Pickering and Chatto, 2003): 16, 391; hereafter: (*DQ*).

¹³ Reiman (1965): 470. Cf. Haven (1963): 137, ‘Lamb was doing in prose something akin to what others, especially Wordsworth and Coleridge, were doing in poetry, and his essays at their best exhibit an equally careful and artful poetic structure’.

¹⁴ Reiman (1965): 477.

¹⁵ On Lamb’s ‘recessive’ turn of mind Parker writes, ‘such sentiments mesh with Scott’s political and social perspectives nicely, registering simultaneously the allure of the past and the unacceptability of the present’. Parker (2000): 46.

¹⁶ Walter Pater, *Appreciations: With an Essay on Style* (London: Macmillan, 1889): 118.

¹⁷ Virginia Woolf, ‘Street Haunting: A London Adventure’, *The Essays of Virginia Woolf*, ed. Andrew McNeillie, 4 vols. (London: The Hogarth Press, 1994): 4, 490.

¹⁸ Charles Baudelaire, ‘The Painter of Modern Life’, *Modernism: An Anthology of Sources and Documents* eds. Vassiliki Kolocotroni, Jane Goodman and Olga Taxidou (Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 1998): 102-8.

¹⁹ Seamus Perry, ‘Charles Lamb and the Cost of Seriousness’, *Charles Lamb Bulletin* n.s. 83 (July 1993): 86.

²⁰ *DQ*: 16, p. 367.

²¹ Thomas McFarland puts it well: ‘in the intertext of the essayistic verisimilitudes we can repeatedly discern the verities of Lamb’s beleaguered existence’ *Romantic Cruxes: the English Essayists and the Spirit of the Age* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987): 47.

²² See Jerome McGann, ‘Keats and the Historical Method in Literary Criticism’, *The Beauty of Inflections: Literary Investigations in Historical Method and Theory* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985): 15-65.

²³ *The Works of Mary and Charles Lamb* ed. E.V. Lucas, 7 vols. (London: Methuen and Co., 1903): 2, 175.

²⁴ Thomas De Quincey, *Confessions of an English Opium Eater and Other Writings*, ed. Barry Milligan (London: Penguin Classics, 2003): 68.

²⁵ It was an obvious enough Elian feature for P.G. Patmore to place it centre stage in his 1826 parody of Lamb, ‘An Unsentimental Journey’ in *Rejected Articles*, which opens ‘Reader ... reading thyself every day addressed as “reader”, (not to reckon the flattering additaments of “gentle”, “generous”, “tasteful”, “learned”, “critical”, and so forth)’ (*Parodies of the Romantic Age* eds. Graham Stones and John Strachan, 6 vols. (London: Pickering and Chatto, 1999): 5, 7.

²⁶ Perry (1993): 78-89.

²⁷ ‘What a rash man Shelley was, to put to sea in a frail boat with Jack’s poetry on board! Why, man, it would sink a trireme. In the preface to Mr Shelley’s poems we are told that “his vessel bore out of sight with a favourable wind”; but what is that to the purpose? It had *Endymion* on board, and there was an end’. *Blackwood’s*: 16, 288.

²⁸ *DQ*: 16, 379. This evaluation may have something to do with De Quincey’s verdict that ‘Lamb had the dramatic intellect and taste, perhaps in perfection; of the Epic, he had none at all’ (p. 381).

²⁹ Indeed popular Magazines were routinely bound together to make sets for the year, and could even go into multiple editions, and so were in some sense built to last.

Part One: Two Writers Approach the Metropolis

Lamb’s London is, I will argue, key to his engagement with temporality and nostalgia in his essays, and by looking first at a quite different response to the modern metropolitan experience in Book VII of Wordsworth’s *Preludes*, I hope to bring out some of what is vital and distinct in Lamb. Lucy Newlyn has argued that in Book VII, ‘the city, for so long a symbol or a foil, had come into its own’,⁶ but the ostensible force of Book VII is to *manage* all that is uncontrollable in the city. What is undoubtedly true is that Wordsworth recognises the city’s power as he does nowhere else in his poetry (for example the 1802 Westminster Bridge sonnet only accepts the city by pastoralising it), but even amid the clamorous riot of the Bartholomew Fair scenes (*P*, ll. 648-94), the Wordsworthian self never quite loses control.

The key moment in Book VII is Wordsworth’s somewhat whimsical request for the muse’s aid to waft him ‘above the press and danger of the crowd’ (*P*, l. 657). His London, even before the Bartholomew Fair passage, is made up of clamorous sounds and incoherent sights. The city is too much to be contained by the Wordsworthian mind; from ‘Albinos, painted Indians, Dwarfs’ (*P*, l. 680) to an intriguing ‘Horse of knowledge’ (*P*, l. 681), ‘All out-o’-the-way, far-fetched, perverted things ... [are] jumbled up together to make up / This Parliament of Monsters’ (*P*, ll. 687, 690-1). Visuality, immediacy and theatricality⁷ are all part of Wordsworth’s terror, but perhaps the most telling phrase in the Book is ‘the press /

Of self-destroying, transitory things' (P, ll. 738-9). *The Prelude's* project, familiarly enough, is a process of self-building; out of ephemeral sense experience Wordsworthian memory builds a permanent monument. The jumbled succession of objects that confronts the bewildered gaze in the city allows no room for calm meditation; the mind-swallowing vastness of city experience presents a distinct threat to the *Prelude's* project, but Wordsworth manages a solution:

But though the picture weary out the eye,
By nature an unmanageable sight,
It is not wholly so to him who looks
In steadiness, who hath among least things
An under-sense of greatest; sees the parts
As parts, but with a feeling of the whole. (P, ll. 707-712)

With the muse's aid (P, l. 655), which is to say, through poetry, Wordsworth is able to locate in the midst of this threatening succession of images a sense of unity and coherence. Where earlier the perpetual succession of sights swamped the mind, here the gaze is steadied, and the incoherent singularity of the modern metropolis is recognised as part of a comforting whole. That Wordsworth is able in *The Prelude*, in the very midst of his epic task of self-building, to recognise the power and the possibility of this kind of metropolitan experience is a remarkable example of his faith in the transcendent power of mind and memory. Despite his daring inclusion of the transitory in all its self-destroying power, Wordsworth, to paraphrase Hazlitt, has created a full-length mirror for himself – the dirt and degradation of the metropolis is the last place one would expect to find it, but it is the Wordsworthian sublime that is reaffirmed. Wordsworth is able to make, through memory and a mind focused inward, something permanent of the city's threatening transience.

'The streets of London are his fairy land, teeming with wonder'.⁸ wrote Hazlitt of Lamb in his 1825 *Spirit of the Age* portrait, and it is the sights, sounds and delights of the modern metropolis that animate Lamb's essays. He was not wholly averse to the claims of the country⁹ but the evidence of his essays suggests a mind animated, not alienated, by the 'thickening hubbub'. Lamb's early essay 'The Londoner' (inspired by the epistolary debate with Wordsworth on the competing claims of country and city)¹⁰ has him 'born...in a crowd' (LL, 1, p. 306), and throughout his work, what turned Wordsworth off turned Lamb on. The clamorous sounds, the press of the crowds, the very variety of the characters and incidents in the metropolis, are his constant theme.

Although it will be his career as an essayist that will concern me most here, Lamb's letters on London provide a fascinating insight into his engagement with the city. Having decided to visit Thomas Manning in Cambridge rather than visit Wordsworth in Grasmere, Lamb writes to Manning his anti-Wordsworthian counter-manifesto:

Just as important to me (in a sense) is all the furniture of my world – eye-pampering, but satisfies no heart. Streets, streets, streets, markets, theatres, churches, Covent Gardens, shops sparkling with pretty faces of industrious milliners, neat sempstresses, ladies cheapening, gentlemen behind counters lying, authors in the street with spectacles, George Dyers (you may know them by their gait), lamps lit at night, pastry cooks' and silversmiths' shops, beautiful Quakers of Pentonville, noises of coaches, drowsy cry of mechanic watchmen at night, with bucks reeling home drunk; if you happen to wake at midnight, cries of Fire and Stop thief; inns of court, with their learned air, and halls, and butteries, just like Cambridge colleges; old book-stalls, Jeremy Taylors, Burtons on Melancholy, and Religio Medicis on every stall. These are thy pleasures, O London with-the-many-sins. O City abounding in whores, for these may Keswick and her giant brood go hang! (LL, 1, pp. 223-4)

This wonderful, endlessly expansive account of the pleasures of London finds room for objects pointedly part of a modern world of movement and change. Everything in Lamb's city is transitory; each object is momentary, it passes as soon as it is glimpsed to be replaced by the next. The dull trudge of 'streets, streets, streets' introduces a riot of sounds and images, but it is the monotonous endlessness of the vast city's streets and all they contain, their very prosaic mundanity, that for Lamb provides a source of wonder. That these things are 'eye-pampering, but satisfy no heart' seems to present a critical problem, but, instead, their very ordinariness and impermanence become integral to the delight they offer. Where Wordsworth's steady gaze is able to make of a beggar 'a type / Or emblem of the utmost that we know, / Both of ourselves and of the universe' (P, ll. 617-9), Lamb takes a vivacious joy in the wholly unblemished dirtiness, the vulgarity of his street scene. Lamb does not try to get above the crowd of impressions in order to see the parts as parts of a grander whole.¹¹ Instead drunken bucks brush against Quaker girls, cries are heard, lamps are lit, plays are performed; object jostles against object in a succession of impressions that only stops because Lamb stops looking.

Lamb comments in 'The Londoner', with a little irony, that he begins to mark out '...grand principles of honour at work in the dirty ring which encompasses two combatants with fists, and principles of no less eternal justice in the tumultuous detectors of a pickpocket' (LL, Vol. 1, p. 307). In the Manning letter, however, there is no pietistic moralising on the scene; indeed, there is no space for the mind's operation at all. The endless succession of objects of perception permits no contemplation; the mind, the self, is simply overwhelmed by the tide of spectacle. The Elia essays, I will argue, do not maintain this sense of rushing immediacy – as De Quincey noticed in 1848¹² (and he was not the last to do so), the sense of nostalgia and half-subdued melancholy in Lamb is too strong for this – but the way he engages with the city spectacle leaves him quite distant from the Wordsworthian sublime. Both the impermanence of the city scene and the distracted, inattentive way in which the mind registers it are vital features of an understanding of Lamb's method in his most celebrated essays.

Part Two: Lamb's London, Lamb's Nostalgia

Lamb, I want to suggest, makes a virtue of disunity, and his records of city experience discover the workings of a mind open to the rhythm and movement of the modern metropolis. This city experience is very much in the present tense, yet this seems out of step with critical understandings of his nostalgic reverence for the past. Donald H Reiman's argument for his essays as 'successful ...works of art' refutes the then critical commonplace that the best, if not the only, quality of the essays is their 'disorder and unbridled whimsicality'¹³ in favour of a reading that recognises the essays' formal coherence. Lamb's focus on transitory and ephemeral objects is elevated to the eternal; 'Elia's china tea-cups present a still point amid a world of flux, and, at the same time, a stimulus for the human imagination'.¹⁴ The essays mirror Romantic poems in more than their beauty and formal unity; just as Wordsworth had hoped for his own poems, the grandeur and depth of feeling in the essays transports them from an uncertain present into a welcoming and stable critical posterity. What does the work of elevation is Lamb's nostalgic fondness for the past – it is the tea-cups' ancientness that ensures their eternal and lasting quality – he delves into the past to create for himself an atemporal existence outside of the disappointments of the everyday.

Even Lamb's more historicist critics have seen him as driven by a desire to escape the present. Hazlitt has him as part of the Spirit of the Age, but as one who avoids the rhythm of the present:

Mr Lamb has succeeded not by conforming to the *Spirit of the Age*, but in opposition to it. He does not march boldly along with the crowd, but steals off the pavement to pick his way in the contrary direction. He prefers *bye-ways* to *highways*. When the full tide of human life pours along to some festive show, to some pageant of a day, Elia would stand on one side to look over an old book-stall. (*H*, 11, p. 178)

Although Hazlitt does not have Lamb making eternity out of obscure antiquities, his sense of him as one neglecting what is passing and unimportant ('some pageant of a day') in favour of antiquities is telling and influential: he 'evades the present, he mocks the future' (*H*, 11, p. 181). Mark Parker's recent account of British magazine culture is a long way from the likes of Reiman and Haven, but his account too has Lamb searching for a still point amid the flux of the political present. For Parker, it is this quest that made Lamb so amenable to the editorial machinations of John Scott, whom Parker has ingeniously placing Lamb in the *London* in such a way that Lamb's search for a more comfortable past comments on and adds to the contemporary political aims of Scott's magazine.¹⁵

Nostalgia and an elegiac mourning for a vanished past is, it seems, an unavoidable aspect of Lamb; but I want to suggest that his sense of the past is rather more nuanced than much criticism allows. My point is similar to Parker's – it is by engaging with the past that he becomes a part of the present – but my focus is more literary than political, and allows Lamb agency where Parker places exegetical control in the hands of Scott. Lamb's nostalgia, I will argue, is of a piece with his sense of the city as something in movement, never still, impression succeeding impression and leaving no trace. My understanding of the workings of Lamb's nostalgia brings me closer to Walter Pater: 'he feels the poetry of these things, as the poetry of things old indeed, but surviving as an actual part of the life of the present, and as something quite different from the poetry of things flatly gone from us and antique. . .'.¹⁶ What this expresses is both Lamb's sense of the spirit of the age, and also his recognition of the nature of his own status as a magazine writer. An impermanent world of flux, as he recognises it in his essays' depictions of metropolitan life, is the present tense within which he places his own writing, and the impact on the essays is to identify the essays themselves as sharing the impermanent nature of the ephemerae they describe.

It is the 'shows' of London which dominate in most accounts of life in the metropolis from the period, but just as important for Lamb are the city's sounds; street cries are part of the rush of impressions in the letter to Manning, and these take a central role in his 'Chapter on Ears'. Elia confesses that he stands alone in an age devoted to music – he is 'singly unimpressable' (*E*, p. 89) by its beauties. Characteristically, however, he does not mourn this incapacity, but celebrates music's opposite. Describing the quite different irritation produced by a carpenter's hammer, he writes:

those unconnected, unset sounds are nothing to the measured malice of music. The ear is passive to those single strokes; willingly enduring stripes, while it hath no task to con. To music it cannot be passive. It will strive – mine will at least – 'spite of its inaptitude, to thrud the maze; like an unskilled eye painfully poring upon hieroglyphics. (*E*, p. 89)

The problem with music is the need for attention; one cannot allow impressions to wash over one; there is a 'task to con'; harmony must be sought out and constructed by the mind. Such is his aversion to this form of mental focus that:

I have sat through an Italian Opera, till, for sheer pain, and inexplicable anguish, I have rushed out into the noisiest places of the crowded streets, to solace myself with sounds, which I was not obliged to follow, and get rid of the torment of endless, fruitless, barren attention! I take refuge in the unpretending assemblage of honest common-life sounds; – and the purgatory of an Enraged Musician becomes my paradise. (*E*, p. 89-90)

The focus required to create harmony and purity out of music, the tyranny of the attentive mind, finds its antidote in the 'blank confusion' of the streets. Lamb's sense of music here mirrors Wordsworth's conception of the operation of the mind upon sense impressions – the attentive mind must work to recognise 'parts / As parts but with a feeling of the whole' (*P*, ll. 711-2). Lamb's pleasure comes not from a mind intent on unifying, but from a mind distracted amid incoherence.

For Wordsworth, it is the self that ultimately overcomes incoherence. In Book XI he describes the eye as 'the most despotic of our senses' (*P*, l. 173); it is upon feeling and meditation rather than sensation that he focuses. For Lamb, however, the attentive self is the problem, not the solution; art requires 'attention' in order for its aesthetic unity to be appreciated, but the accidental street sounds wash over the passive self; indeed, they leave no room for a self or meditative attention at all. More than a century later, Virginia Woolf describes a similar experience of 'Street Haunting' in which she finds 'one is not tethered to a single mind, but can put on briefly for a few minutes the bodies and minds of others'.¹⁷ Baudelaire similarly sees modern urban man as one part of a crowd of impressions:

the lover of universal life moves into the crowd as though into an enormous reservoir of electricity. He, the lover of life, may also be compared to a mirror as vast as this crowd; to a kaleidoscope endowed with consciousness, with which every one of its movements presents a pattern of life, in all its multiplicity, and the flowing grace of all the elements that go to compose life.¹⁸

I do not wish to remake Lamb as a proto-modernist here, and yet I would claim that his sense of a self transformed by inattention allows him to become one aspect of the world around him, repeating the rhythm of the time in all its jarring complexity.

Lamb's first essay under the 'phantom cloud of Elia' (*E*, p. 65) begins in the wistful, nostalgic register that would cause many a critic to agree with Seamus Perry that "'Elia", to my ear at least, carries the echo of "elegist"'.¹⁹ He addresses the South-Sea House:

situated as thou art, in the very heart of stirring and living commerce, – amid the fret and fever of speculation – with the Bank, and the 'Change, and the India-house about thee, in the hey-day of present prosperity, with their important faces, as it were, insulting thee, their *poor neighbour out of business* – to the idle and merely contemplative, – to such as me, old house, there is a charm in thy quiet: – a cessation – a coolness from business – an indolence almost cloistral – which is delightful! (*E*, p. 4)

The old office is certainly antiquated, and its charming quaintness amid the flux of modernity – the South-Sea House representing a comforting, idealised relic of a commercial past in quiet contrast to the busy and prosperous India-house, Britain's colonial future – seems to support Reiman's argument. Elia's relaxed, conversational opening suggests the building's peripherality to the modern street scene: 'Reader, in thy passage from the Bank ... didst thou never observe a melancholy looking, handsome, brick and stone edifice, to the left – where Threadneedle-street abuts upon Bishopsgate?' (*E*, p. 1). Elia acts as tour guide, taking the Reader out of the way of the metropolitan crowds and commercial traffic to point out what might often be missed – and there it hides – not there – just to the left. The South-Sea House is marked as separate and different from modernity, but Lamb situates it very purposefully in a recognisable contemporary landscape.

This conversational languor continues into his description of the old-fashioned 'bachelors who worked in the House. They were 'of all descriptions ... they necessarily carried into it their separate habits and oddities, unqualified, if I may so speak, as into a common stock' (*E*, p. 5).

Just like the commercial enterprise and the melancholy building itself, these men are anachronisms, incongruities. The modern world marched forward but they remained 'humorists', content to be oddities. Lamb's nostalgia is nostalgia in the face of modernism; his essay has the South-Sea House crumbling into deserts of vast eternity as the crowd of Lamb's readers and the rest of the modern world hurries past. 'What reality has the past?', he asks, and he turns to his readers in the closing paragraphs:

Reader, what if I have been playing with thee all this while – peradventure the very *names*, which I have summoned before thee, are fantastic – insubstantial... Be satisfied that something answering to them has had a being. Their importance is from the past. (*E*, p. 14)

The metropolis is by nature miscellaneous, part of the 'multitudinous moving picture' (*LL*, 1, p. 306) of impressions, and this lends the past a strange unreality. Rather than an atemporal still point by means of which Lamb may enact a Wordsworthian recovery of deep feeling, Lamb's sense of the world around him suggests a rather different engagement with time and change. Imaginatively, Lamb finds the past irrecoverable: if it has a reality it is not that which the mind creates *with it*, but its existence as material object outside of the perceiving mind, as something that is part of an ever-changing city landscape. De Quincey perceptively places Lamb's 'constant recurrence to ancient recollections and to decaying household life' directly in the context of 'the tumult of new and revolutionary generations'.²⁰ In an uncertain, unstable and unmanageably vast present, in a world of increasing mechanism, of speed, tumult and change, loss and decay will feature centrally in any vision of the city. The past's power comes from its place in the modern metropolitan scene, as something already fading, already marked as past.

This sense of a necessarily faded past as part of an immediate present is an almost constant preoccupation in the Elia essays. Lamb's half-suppressed melancholy has been frequently pointed out,²¹ and this melancholy is an aspect of his sense of the inevitability of historical change. Lamb's exultant list of London's glories in the Manning letter is, I will argue, part of his habit of searching out the obscure *amid* the flux (and not, as Hazlitt would have it, in opposition to it) and this gives the key to his essays and his mind's engagement with the age. The image of the South-Sea House as a delightful anachronism, a 'magnificent relic' (*E*, p. 3), sadly but irrevocably fading before the eyes, is at the centre of Elian nostalgia. His 'New Year's Eve' asks:

sun and sky, and breeze, and solitary walks, and summer holidays, and the greenness of fields, and the delicious juices of meats and fishes, and society, and the cheerful glass, and candle-light, and fire-side conversations, and innocent vanities, and jests, and *irony itself* – do these things go out with life? (*E*, p. 67)

The answer, unuttered but undeniably, is 'yes'; these are ephemeral pleasures, joyous trivialities, not intimations of eternity. It is in this that Lamb differs most markedly from Wordsworth. Lamb does not combat time or seek to transcend it, drawing impressions into the self to make them a part of a grand whole. Rather, he turns to the fading past, his book-stall, or his South-Sea House hidden amid the bustle of commerce, not as a refuge from the present, but as part of that same rushing and irresistible tide of modernity; he mourns their passing, but not with a sense that his art can remake them as elements of a transcendent self. The city will keep sweeping by; something answering to Lamb's oddities had a being, but it is already a part of the past. Lamb's nostalgia is placed squarely in a vividly realised, immediate present.

Part Three: Magazine Subjectivity

My final argument is that Elian nostalgia works also to produce his sense of subjectivity, his authorial presence, and that this sense of literary subjectivity is intimately bound up with his sense of his essays' place in a magazine. For Hazlitt, Lamb must be understood as a periodical writer:

Mr Lamb, from the peculiarity of his exterior and address as an author, would probably never have made his way by detached and independent efforts; but, fortunately for himself and others, he has taken advantage of the Periodical Press, where he has been stuck into notice, and the texture of his compositions is assuredly fine enough to bear the broadest glare of popularity that has hitherto shone upon them. (*H*, 11, p. 182)

Since Jerome McGann,²² a literary work's first place of publication has moved to the centre of critical attention, and most recent criticism sees Lamb, as Hazlitt did, unable to make his way by 'detached and independent efforts', his work gaining its full significance only within the periodical in which it was first published. What I will suggest is that the aesthetic manner that I have described is part of, and takes its power from, Lamb's half-articulated sense of his essays as part of the magazine market. What he creates is a kind of magazine subjectivity: not so much a sense of self – that's Wordsworth's job – as a sense of his articles' existence in precisely that world of flux and temporal decay that he elegises.

Lamb's 'Detached Thoughts on Books and Reading' describes the plight of a man deprived of periodical literature:

poor Tobin, who latterly fell blind, did not regret it so much for the weightier kinds of reading – the 'Paradise Lost' or 'Comus' he could have *read* to him – but he missed the pleasure of skimming over with his own eye a magazine or light pamphlet.²³

This manner of reading recalls Lamb's own style of reading the street scene – the eye passes quickly over that which is itself light and passing – it does not propose to plumb epic Miltonic depths, but skims over the surface. Lamb picks up on this in 'Oxford in the Vacation' as he imagines the reader's likely manner of reading the essays of Elia. Here we have one of the few conscious recognitions of the essays as part of a magazine, rather than essays which happened to appear first in a magazine, but have now found their proper home in a collected edition. The reader, Lamb assumes, will glance first to the bottom of an article to discover the signature; and the magazine reader's glancing eye 'while it reads, seems as though it read not' (*E*, p. 15). Where Wordsworth 'reads' the street scene in order to absorb it, to transform the trivial into a part of what is permanent in the self, Lamb's reading eye resists the pull towards permanence and memory. The skimming, glancing eye suggests something closer to the rushing, impersonal and uncontainable immediacy of Lamb's letter to Manning, and he recognises his own writing for magazines as part of a reading experience that is itself impermanent and transitory. Where much poetry contemporary with Lamb, as Andrew Bennett has argued, seeks for permanence in an imagined posterity, here is a form of writing that, if not quite glorying in ephemerality – Elia remains an elegist – sees itself as part of something that is inevitably fading, ineluctably impermanent.

Lamb frequently puts 'the Reader' at the centre of his essays – he draws him in, he offers a chair beside him at the fireside. This was a common enough tactic in the magazine culture of the period (De Quincey addresses a 'Reader' in the *Confessions* 'into whose private ear I am confidentially whispering my confessions',²⁴ though *Blackwood's Magazine's* 'Noctes Ambrosianae' series is perhaps the most prominent example) but Lamb makes a particular habit of it.²⁵ The 'South-Sea House' presumes so much knowledge of the reader as to create a character for him: 'Reader, in thy passage from the Bank – where thou hast been receiving thy half-yearly dividends (supposing thou art a lean annuitant like myself) ...' (*E*, p. 1). Elian charm has come to be something of a critical problem – it is from his charm that Reiman and Haven attempt to save him, though Seamus Perry has made a persuasive case for that charm's power and relevance²⁶ – but it is on the basis of his pleasing and disarming manner that he is able to place his reader so firmly in the street-scene that dominates his essays. 'Who is Elia?' he asks in his second essay. The answer is, one just like you, reader:

because in my last I tried to divert thee with some half-forgotten humours of some old clerks defunct, in an old house of business, long since gone to decay, doubtless you have already set me down in your mind as one of the self-same college – a votary of the desk – a notched and cropt scrivener – one that sucks his sustenance, as certain sick people are said to do, through a quill. Well, I do agnize something of the sort. (*E*, p. 15)

By pulling the reader into the world of the essay, Lamb simultaneously pulls the essay into the world of the contemporary reader – into the same world where clerks scribble at desks and walk to the bank past the old South-Sea House with the *London Magazine* in their pocket. The same streets, the same magazines, the same pamphlets; all are part of a familiar world shared by both reader and essayist. Hazlitt has Lamb ‘stuck in to notice’ by his work for the Periodical Press; his sense of himself in his magazine articles as part of the magazine world places him directly into the present tense, into the immediacy of the now.

Lamb’s forcible insistence on his own presence in the present is but one part of his engagement with the passing shows of the modern metropolis. The South-Sea House is a ‘magnificent relic’ (*E*, p. 3), a beggar a ‘grand fragment; as good as an Elgin Marble’ (*E*, p. 271). But the most prominent reminder of the inevitability of decay in the essays is that celebrated elegist, the pride of the *London*, Elia himself. His description of the South-Sea House decaying amid the bustle of commerce concludes by naming it modernity’s ‘*poor neighbour out of business*’, though it remains alluring ‘to the idle and merely contemplative – to such as me, old house! there is a charm in thy quiet’ (*E*, p. 4). The idle and contemplative Elia, the intriguing figure gazing over an old book stall, glimpsed briefly as the tide of modernity streams past, is of a piece with the subjects of his essays. Lamb was amongst the most successful of magazine writers – earning more than even Hazlitt could command – and his essays were popular enough to be deemed worthy of collection and republication in 1823. Yet the sense of historical change and the transitory nature of all that is past in the face of the rushing tide of the present comes back to haunt his own work. In Lamb’s *London*, the mind cannot command one impression before another succeeds it; the experience of the present is the experience of the ephemeral; all things change and pass. The essayistic self, reflecting and reporting the multitudinous, shifting modern scene within the pages of the *London* depends upon a recognition of that self’s impermanence; he cannot help but recognise his own temporality, his own part in this process of decay.

Blackwood’s Magazine was perhaps the most self-conscious of the new magazines, and in 1824 they aimed a telling witticism in the direction of their old foes, the Cockneys. In their inimitable manner, they mourn the death of the poet Shelley, lately drowned in Italy: his boat sank because he took a copy of *Endymion* on board with him.²⁷ What underlies the joke (in addition to the suggestion of the two-fold leadenness of the ponderous and lengthy *Endymion*) is the same concern with ephemerality and contemporaneity that is found in Lamb. The figurative and literal weightiness of Keats, along with Wordsworth, Coleridge and many another searching for a grand and totalising work to persist through the clamour of the present into a calm critical posterity, is just what is not possible in magazine writing. In describing Lamb’s likely habit of reading with the perpetual threat of interruption, De Quincey remarks, ‘reading by snatches, and by intervals of precarious leisure, people form the habit of seeking and unduly valuing condensation of meaning, where in truth reading suffers by the short-hand exhibition, or else they demand too vivid illustrations of meaning’.²⁸ Magazine reading is not solemn, calm or deep, but fast moving, distracted, and intent on entertainment. Lamb’s writing is always aware of itself as in both senses lighter than *Endymion*. Magazine articles, and Lamb’s essays in particular, deal with the passing shows of the day, and are read as a passing show themselves; although Lamb as one of the most celebrated writers of the day could think of the possibility of a collected edition of his magazine work,²⁹ his essays never avoid an awareness of their own impermanence. It is the immediacy and vastness of the city scene that Lamb appreciates, but it also makes impossible the kind of literary solution that Keats’s twofold weightiness offers. His essays depend upon an immediate present, but that present moment continually reveals relics of the past, not as recoverable truths, but as melancholy reminders that what is present now will itself later be past.

Within the *London*, Lamb is one among many; a little stranger than some, and a little better than most, but ultimately little more than another passing metropolitan show. He may have shone brightly amid the multitudinous productions of the periodical press, but more magazines, newspapers, reviews would be published. These are light and passing things; these are modern things; and as such the modern public’s eye will read them as Lamb reads the city. Elia finds his own likeness in the subjects of his magazine essays. Lamb turns to the ephemeral, to what is fading in the life of the present and finds that city realities mirror literary realities. As he allows his own eye to move across the ever-abundant metropolis, letting impression succeed impression, Lamb does not attempt to fix the passing, but softly eulogises each dying thing in its passing, as something that takes its importance from its decay. The presence of the present in Lamb turns the eye towards what is transitory, fading; his very lightness fits him to reflect the age as few others could, but only by recognising his own necessary impermanence. His is the true nostalgia; the longing for that which is irrecoverably lost. What is most plangently felt is that the modern process he records will not stop at the subjects of his essays; Elia and all his productions will themselves in their turn fade before the light of day.

Bringing Hazlitt Back to Life: Leigh Hunt, John Forster and the *Examiner*

By JAMES GRANDE

THOMAS CARLYLE APPEARS TO HAVE UNDERGONE A DRAMATIC TRANSFORMATION in his assessment of Hazlitt shortly before the critic's death. While Jack Carlyle, the writer's brother, attended Hazlitt as his doctor during his final illness, Thomas Carlyle's response to his death shows how far he had travelled from his 1824 description of how 'William Hazlitt takes his punch and oysters and rackets and whore at regular intervals; escaping from bailiffs as he best can, and writing when they grow unguidable by any other means ... I never saw him or wished to'.¹ 'Poor Hazlitt! There is one star less in the Heavens', Carlyle writes, which would be missed 'in the lonely journeys and far voyages (of Thought)'.² And, after Hazlitt's death, Carlyle turned to Leigh Hunt as a friend of Hazlitt who could keep his work in the public mind – a move that would be repeated by Dickens and Forster. In November 1832, Carlyle writes to Hunt, 'I still wish much you would write Hazlitt's *Life*. Somewhat of History lay in that too luckless man, and you, of all I can think of, have the organ for discerning it and delineating it'.³ Almost a year later, Carlyle is still trying to persuade Hunt to take up the project, in almost the same words, 'I still continue to wish much you would undertake the *Life of Hazlitt*.... Of all imaginable Books True Biographies are the best, the most essential. Hazlitt should not be forgotten'.⁴ Carlyle's implication is clear: Hunt is in a unique position to write the biography, as a close, surviving friend of Hazlitt who had the skill and authority as a writer which the project needed. Of course, Hunt never did write a biography, but his many reviews of Hazlitt show his efforts to ensure that his friend would not be forgotten.

Hunt was someone a new generation of writers could turn to if they wanted to hear Hazlitt remembered in conversation or see his memory preserved in print, becoming, by virtue of his sheer longevity, an important link between Hazlitt and Dickens. After Dickens's vicious portrayal of him as Skimpole in *Bleak House*, it is easy to forget how close Dickens and Hunt were. However, they were good friends from the mid 1830s, when Forster introduced Dickens to Hunt, and some measure of their friendship is given by the fact that in 1839, Dickens describes celebrating his birthday with 'only my own folks, Leigh Hunt, Ainsworth, and Forster'.⁵ In temperament, Hunt, the improvident, dilettante Regency survivor, and Forster, the scrupulously respectable Victorian, were far apart. As the satiric portrayals of Hunt as *Bleak House*'s Skimpole and Forster as *Our Mutual Friend*'s Podsnap suggest, Dickens had anxieties which ran in both directions, anxious that literature should become a respectable profession but remaining equally aware of the creative dangers of becoming *too* respectable. If Hunt reminded Dickens of his father, and his deep fear that all literary careers ended in financial ruin, he saw in Forster, as described in the character of Podsnap, 'Literature; large print, respectfully descriptive of getting up at eight, shaving close at a quarter past, breakfasting at nine, going to the City at ten, coming home at half-past five, and dining at seven'.⁶ However, in the 1830s, these satiric portraits were many years away and, despite all their differences, Hunt and Forster both played an important part in Hazlitt's Victorian survival and his influence on Dickens. That Forster, along with Dickens, became a sharer in Hazlitt's continuing survival is suggested by another letter from Carlyle, this time to Forster: 'Dear Forster, – Emerson and I are going off to see Stonehenge tomorrow: I wished to ask you about Hazzlitt's [sic] (and Dickens's and your) Inn; a weighty inquiry'.⁷ Forster and Dickens had visited Winterslow Hut in March 1848, 'birthplace of some of his finest essays', and in Forster's *Life* this trip is suggestively placed in the narrative of events leading up to the writing of *David Copperfield*.⁸ Carlyle's letter of July 1848 shows he heard about the trip to Winterslow soon after it took place, and that he now regarded Forster and Dickens, like Hunt, as having a share in the memory of Hazlitt.

¹ *The Collected Letters of Thomas and Jane Welsh Carlyle, Volume 3*, ed. Sanders and Fielding, (Durham, North Carolina, 1976), to Thomas Murray, 27 Aug 1824, p. 139; hereafter: *Carlyle*.

² *Carlyle, Volume 5*, p. 184.

³ *Carlyle, Volume 6*, p. 265.

⁴ *Carlyle, Volume 7*, p. 31.

⁵ To J.P. Harley, 7 Feb 1839, qu. in Payson G. and Eleanor M. Gates, *William Hazlitt and Leigh Hunt: The Continuing Dialogue* (Essex, Connecticut, 2000), p. 158.

⁶ Dickens, *Our Mutual Friend*, qu. in James A. Davies, *John Forster: A Literary Life* (Leicester, 1983), p. 180.

⁷ *The Collected Letters of Thomas and Jane Welsh Carlyle, Volume 23*, ed. Clyde de L. Ryals and Kenneth J. Fielding, (Durham, North Carolina, and London, 1995) to John Forster, 6 July 1848, p. 62.

⁸ Forster, *Life of Dickens*, p. 523.

⁹ Davies, *John Forster*, p. 214.

¹⁰ Gates and Gates, *The Continuing Dialogue*, p. 161.

¹¹ Tillotson and Burgis, 'Forster's reviews in the *Examiner*, 1840-41', *The Dickensian* (LXVIII, 1972), cited in Davies, *John Forster*, p. 212.

¹² Forster Collection, National Art Museum.

¹³ William Hazlitt, *Sketches and Essays by William Hazlitt, Now First Collected by His Son* (London, 1839) in the Forster Collection of the National Art Library, Victoria and Albert Museum, London.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 154.

- ¹⁵ Ibid., 212.
- ¹⁶ Ibid., 172.
- ¹⁷ *Examiner* No. 1609 (London, 2 Dec 1838), p. 756.
- ¹⁸ Hazlitt, *Sketches and Essays*, Forster Collection, p. 116.
- ¹⁹ Ibid., 129.
- ²⁰ Ibid., 130.
- ²¹ Ibid., 134.
- ²² Ibid., 139.
- ²³ Ibid., 151.
- ²⁴ Ibid., 334.
- ²⁵ Ibid., 166.
- ²⁶ Ibid., 166.
- ²⁷ Ibid., 196.
- ²⁸ Ibid., 202.
- ²⁹ *Examiner* No. 1609, p. 757.
- ³⁰ Qu. in Davies, *John Forster*, p. 85.
- ³¹ A.B. Hopkins, *Elizabeth Gaskell: Her Life and Works* (1952) qu. in Davies, *John Forster*, pp. 93-4.
- ³² Thornton Hunt ed., *Correspondence* (1862), qu. in Davies, *John Forster*, p. 21.
- ³³ *Examiner* No. 1609, p. 757.
- ³⁴ Forster, *Life of Dickens*, p. 190.
- ³⁵ *Examiner* (1841), qu. in Ledger, *Dickens and the Popular Radical Imagination*, p. 131.
- ³⁶ *Examiner* (1841), qu. in Forster, *Life of Dickens*, p. 192.
- ³⁷ Forster, *Life of Dickens*, p. 190.
- ³⁸ Davies, *John Forster*, p. 177.
- ³⁹ *The Letters of Charles Dickens: Volume 2, 1840-1*, ed. Madeline House and Graham Storey (Oxford, 1969), to Forster, 13 Aug 1841, p. 357.
- ⁴⁰ Charles Dickens, *David Copperfield* (1850, Oxford, 1999), p.394.
- ⁴¹ *ibid.*, p.610.
- ⁴² *Selected Works of William Hazlitt: Volume 6*, ed. Duncan Wu, (London, 1998), 'On Vulgarity and Affectation', p.137.
- ⁴³ *ibid.*, p.138.
- ⁴⁴ *ibid.*, p.141.
- ⁴⁵ *ibid.*, p.142.
- ⁴⁶ Dickens, *David Copperfield*, p.364.
- ⁴⁷ *Selected Works: Volume 8*, ed. Wu, 'On Respectable People', p.335.
- ⁴⁸ *ibid.*, p.336.
- ⁴⁹ Dickens, *David Copperfield*, pp.290-1.
- ⁵⁰ *Selected Works: Volume 8*, ed. Wu, 'On Respectable People', p.338.
- ⁵¹ Charles Dickens, *Little Dorrit* (1857, London, 2003), p.119.
- ⁵² *ibid.*, pp.422-31.
- ⁵³ *Selected Works: Volume 8*, ed. Wu, 'On Respectable People', p.338.
- ⁵⁴ Charles Dickens, *Little Dorrit*, *ibid.*, p.417.
- ⁵⁵ *ibid.*, p.419.
- ⁵⁶ *Selected Works: Volume 8*, ed. Wu, 'On Respectable People', p.337.
- ⁵⁷ *Selected Works: Volume 8*, ed. Wu, 'On Londoners and Country People', p.62.

- ⁵⁸ *Dickens's Journalism, Volume 1: Sketches by Boz and Other Early Papers, 1833-9*, ed. Michael Slater (London, 1994), 'Shabby-Genteel People', p.261.
- ⁵⁹ *Selected Works: Volume 8*, ed. Wu, 'On Londoners and Country People', p.61.
- ⁶⁰ *Dickens's Journalism 1*, ed. Slater, 'Shabby-Genteel People', p.261.
- ⁶¹ *Selected Works: Volume 8*, ed. Wu, 'On Londoners and Country People', p.62.
- ⁶² *Dickens's Journalism 1*, ed. Slater, 'Shabby-Genteel People', p.264.
- ⁶³ *ibid.*, p.263.
- ⁶⁴ Charles Dickens, *The Old Curiosity Shop*, (1841, Oxford, 1999), p.113.
- ⁶⁵ *ibid.*, p.160.
- ⁶⁶ *Selected Works: Volume 8*, ed. Wu, 'On Londoners and Country People', p.61.
- ⁶⁷ *ibid.*, p.64.
- ⁶⁸ *Dickens's Journalism 1*, ed. Slater, 'Shabby-Genteel People', p.262.
- ⁶⁹ *Selected Works: Volume 8*, ed. Wu, 'On Londoners and Country People', p.64.
- ⁷⁰ *Dickens's Journalism 1*, ed. Slater, *Sunday Under Three Heads*, p.483.
- ⁷¹ *Gold's London Magazine* (London, August 1820), qu. in Jeffrey N Cox, *Poetry and Politics in the Cockney School* (Cambridge, 1998) p.35.
- ⁷² *Selected Works: Volume 8*, ed. Wu, 'On Londoners and Country People', p.64.
- ⁷³ *Dickens's Journalism 1*, ed. Slater, *Sunday Under Three Heads*, pp.482-3.
- ⁷⁴ Dickens, *The Old Curiosity Shop*, p. 173.
- ⁷⁵ *ibid.*, p.288.
- ⁷⁶ Dickens, *Little Dorrit*, pp.208-9.
- ⁷⁷ Jon Cook, 'Hazlitt, Speech and Writing', in ed. Kate Campbell, *Journalism, Literature and Modernity: From Hazlitt to Modernism* (Edinburgh, 2000), p.27.
- ⁷⁸ *Selected Works: Volume 2*, ed. Wu, 'On Actors and Acting', p.152.
- ⁷⁹ Dickens, *The Old Curiosity Shop*, p.301.
- ⁸⁰ *Speeches*, ed. Fielding, to the General Theatrical Fund, 6 April 1846, p.75.
- ⁸¹ *Selected Works: Volume 2*, ed. Wu, 'On Actors and Acting', p.156.
- ⁸² *Dickens's Journalism, Volume 2: The Amusements of the People and Other Papers, 1834-51*, ed. Michael Slater (London, 1996), 'The Amusements of the People', p.181.
- ⁸³ *ibid.*, p.196.
- ⁸⁴ *Selected Works: Volume 2*, ed. Wu, 'On Actors and Acting', p.153.
- ⁸⁵ *ibid.*, p.157.
- ⁸⁶ *Dickens's Journalism, Volume 2*, ed. Slater, 'The Amusements of the People', p.181.
- ⁸⁷ *ibid.*, p.181.
- ⁸⁸ *Selected Works: Volume 2*, ed. Wu, 'On Actors and Acting', p.151.
- ⁸⁹ *Dickens's Journalism, Volume 2*, ed. Slater, 'The Amusements of the People', p.185.
- ⁹⁰ *Selected Works: Volume 2*, ed. Wu, 'On Actors and Acting', p.152.
- ⁹¹ *Dickens's Journalism, Volume 2*, ed. Slater, 'The Amusements of the People', p.196.
- ⁹² Charles Dickens, *Hard Times* (1854, New York and London, 2001), p.35.
- ⁹³ *Dickens's Journalism 1*, ed. Slater, 'Shabby-Genteel People', p.262.
- ⁹⁴ Dickens, *David Copperfield*, p.344.
- ⁹⁵ *Selected Works: Volume 8*, ed. Wu, 'On Londoners and Country People', p.70.
- ⁹⁶ *ibid.*, p.825.
- ⁹⁷ *ibid.*, p.200.
- ⁹⁸ *ibid.*, p.517.

⁹⁹ Charles Dickens, *Bleak House* (1853, Oxford, 1996), p.215.

¹⁰⁰ *Selected Works: Volume 8*, ed. Wu, 'On Londoners and Country People', p.63.

¹⁰¹ *Selected Works: Volume 2*, ed. Wu, 'On Mr Kean's Iago', p.18.

¹⁰² Charles Dickens, *David Copperfield*, p.374.

¹⁰³ *Selected Works: Volume 8*, ed. Wu, 'Hot and Cold', p.160.

¹⁰⁴ *Selected Works: Volume 2*, ed. Wu, 'On Gusto', p.79.

¹⁰⁵ *The Letters of Charles Dickens: Volume 8, 1856-8*, ed. Graham Storey and Kathleen Tillotson (Oxford, 1995), to Forster, 5 Sept 1857, p.434.

¹⁰⁶ Ackroyd, *Dickens*, p.592.

¹⁰⁷ Jon Cook, 'Hazlitt, Speech and Writing', p.18.

¹⁰⁸ qu. in Ackroyd, *Dickens*, p.611.

¹⁰⁹ *Selected Works: Volume 2*, ed. Wu, 'On the Same', p.156.

Forster's friendships gave him a deeply influential position in early nineteenth-century literature. In the case of Hazlitt, his friendship with Hunt, combined with his editorship of the *Examiner*, allowed him to preserve Hazlitt's reputation as part of an ongoing exchange which, as in the trip to Winterslow, of which Dickens was an enthusiastic part. In the only study dedicated to Forster, James A Davies describes how his reviewing 'involved the Victorianizing of Romantic attitudes, in particular those of Leigh Hunt'.⁹

Whether or not this is broadly true of Forster's literary journalism, the reception of Hazlitt's posthumous *Sketches and Essays* suggests Forster's desire to preserve, rather than Victorianize, the 'Romantic attitudes' of both Hunt and Hazlitt's *Sketches and Essays*, a collection of rare essays prepared by Hazlitt's son, which was published by Templeman in 1839, part of the extensive re-printing of Hazlitt by Templeman in the late 1830s and early to mid 1840s. As one critic has put it, 'the writings of Hazlitt enjoyed something of a popular revival on both sides of the Atlantic during the 1840s', with Wiley and Putnam re-printing them in America, while Templeman did so in London.¹⁰ Forster, as 'Literary Examiner', was editing the *Examiner's* book and drama reviews at this time, and, while reviews were anonymous, evidence collected by Tillotson and Burgis shows that Forster was himself reviewing in two issues out of every three.¹¹ However, in the case of *Sketches and Essays*, Forster did not choose to write the review himself, despite his deep admiration for Hazlitt (his library contains no fewer than twenty-nine editions of Hazlitt¹²). Instead, he turned to Hunt.

Hunt's authorship of the review in the *Examiner*, 2 December 1838, can be proved by reference to a copy of the book which survives in Forster's library at the National Art Library of the V&A, annotated extensively in Hunt's hand.¹³ By comparison with the review, it is clear that the annotations formed the basis of the review and Hunt's authorship can be therefore be inferred. However, the annotations also contain far more than could be fitted into the confines of a four column review. Almost every one of the eighteen essays has passages marked, and around half contain marginal comments, which are frequently fairly extensive. The effect of reading the essays alongside Hunt's notes is remarkable, conveying a sense almost of being in the same room as both Hunt and Hazlitt. Alternately appreciating and quarrelling with his old friend, Hunt seems to be continuing a conversation that has not been ended by Hazlitt's death almost ten years earlier. Hunt makes notes, as well as marking passages, in eight essays: 'On Cant and Hypocrisy', 'Merry England', 'Self-Love and Benevolence (A Dialogue)', 'On Disagreeable People', 'On Knowledge of the World', 'On Fashion', 'Why the Heroes of Romance are Insipid' and 'On the Spirit of Partisanship'. At times he seems to be simply appreciating his friend's essays – relishing Hazlitt's argument, holding it up for examination and then playfully turning it back on itself. At these points, his annotations seem to be continuing the exchanges of wit which characterised Cockney school gatherings, such as the punning contests at the Lambs' evening parties. When Hazlitt writes about disagreeable people that 'the truth is, in all such cases, we do not sympathise (as we ought) with them, because they do not sympathise (as they ought) with us', Hunt marks the sentence and rallies back at the bottom of the page: 'On the other hand, it might be said that we do sympathise with them – feel their uncomfortableness as they do; and so become disreputable to them, & they to us!' ¹⁴ Similarly, at the end of 'On Fashion', Hunt adds that 'There is a side of sympathy, however, even in fashion, which might contradict half this essay'.¹⁵ In other places, Hunt's annotations are far more personal – the statement in 'On Disagreeable People' that 'diffidence and awkwardness are the two antidotes to love' is marked in Hunt's hand with two exclamation marks, indicating that he knows too well that Hazlitt is writing out of personal experience.¹⁶

Throughout the annotations there is the sense that arguments from twenty or thirty years before are still unresolved, and can be continued within the *Examiner*. The most heavily annotated essay is 'Self-love and Benevolence', where Hunt attempts to engage with his friend's philosophy of the imagination but concludes, as he writes in the review, that 'we do not think it succeeds in establishing his point'.¹⁷ Hunt agrees with Hazlitt on the importance of the imagination: for example, when Hazlitt compares the sympathetic imagination, 'which owes no allegiance to self-interest', with a house that has been taken over by a bailiff, Hazlitt rhetorically demands, 'why, then, not turn out such unwelcome intruders without standing upon ceremony?' His listener cannot answer, so Hunt adds a note conceding the truth of the comparison: 'The answer to this is surely simple, – "Because I can't" – Neither can I get rid of an imagination, purely by dint of will.'¹⁸ However, as the essay goes on, Hunt appears to be increasingly convinced that Hazlitt is down-playing the extent to which the imagination can lead us to act selfishly. When Hazlitt asks his listener to name the 'faculty by which I can project myself into the future', Hunt writes at the side, 'Imagination'.¹⁹ Again, when Hazlitt insists 'I have no sensation of what is to happen to myself in the future', Hunt answers him with his annotation, 'Yes, you have. You have what may be called projected memory'.²⁰ Agreeing with Hazlitt on the centrality of the imagination to how we act as moral agents, Hunt is nonetheless concerned that Hazlitt is underestimating how imagination and 'projected memory' can lead us to act selfishly. Later on in Hazlitt's essay he points out that 'you can tremble at the thought of something which is to happen next week'²¹ and argues that 'imagination is one of our faculties, as well as memory; therefore part of ourselves'.²² Hunt, then, believes that his old friend over-states the argument for the disinterested imagination, and he approvingly marks and comments on the passage at the end of the essay in which Hazlitt finally concedes that we can favour our own future interest by 'anticipating it with greater warmth of present imagination'.²³

At other points in the book, Hunt's annotations are dominated by his personal arguments with Hazlitt – a feature of the annotations which is subsequently down-played in the *Examiner* review. In 'On the Spirit of Partisanship', Hunt adds an exclamation mark beside each of the following seven statements in Hazlitt's description of the Reformers:

They are discontented with themselves and with every thing about them.

They abuse the Government:—when they are baulked or tired of this they fall foul of one another.

The slightest slip or difference of opinion is never forgiven, but gives birth to a deadly feud.

Touch but their petty self-importance, and out comes a flaming denunciation of their own cabal, and all they know about the individuals composing it.

This is not patriotism, but spleen.

To wreak their spite on an individual, they will ruin the cause.

They are true neither to themselves nor to their principles.

Alongside the sentence describing how 'the Reformers are in general, it must be confessed, an ill-conditioned set; and they should be told of this infirmity that most easily besets them', Hunt adds a double exclamation mark in the margins.²⁴ Finally, by the phrase concluding the paragraph – 'they should be taught to hold their tongues, or be drummed out of the regiment as spies and informers' – Hunt adds a triple exclamation mark.²⁵ Clearly, Hunt is suggesting that this description of the character of the Reformers could easily be turned back and applied to Hazlitt.

In two places Hunt's annotations angrily accuse Hazlitt of damaging the cause of reform through his attacks on other writers. When Hazlitt describes Byron imitating Shelley in 'On Disagreeable People', Hunt writes in the margin, 'What an imitation! Of excessive sympathy by unfeeling vanity! It is a pity Mr. Hazlitt could not leave his [?]greater brother-reformers alone. I had a great quarrel with him when alive on that score'.²⁶ But it is in 'On Knowledge of the World' that Hunt sounds angriest: prompted by Hazlitt's reference to *The Spirit of the Age*, he writes:

Hazlitt forgot too, with regard to that book, that a fault-finder may get disliked on his own account, and by parties [unreadable]: & as in other cases, he took it too much for granted, that to find fault was the same thing as discerning a truth.²⁷

Then, at the end of the essay, Hunt exclaims:

Not a word of Charity! or the consideration we shew to one another's faults, not merely out of a sense of one's own, or out of modesty, but from deep & affecting consciousness of all our common wants, & sufferings, & the mystery of existence, & of every man's having some drop of fondness in him, & of our not having originated our own natures.²⁸

In this essay, Hunt finds Hazlitt directed only by spleen and consequently uncharitable. The lines on charity are preserved almost unchanged in the review, where Hazlitt's treatment of Shelley, which so angered Hunt, is tersely summarized as 'not well, not generous, not manly'.²⁹

After enlisting Hazlitt's old friend Hunt to review *Sketches and Essays*, Forster somehow managed to keep the annotated review copy himself, and it found its place in his library at 58 Lincoln's Inn Fields, where 'every inch of wall grew covered with books – later on the little passage also – then the small bedroom & two rooms taken on third floor for Bedroom & Bathroom these also were filled',³⁰ 'filled up with the most beautiful editions of the most beautiful books'.³¹ Hunt and Forster's friendship involved the exchange of books as gifts – in 1831, Forster gave Hunt a gift of a first edition of Steele's *Tatler*, which Hunt described carrying 'about the house with me, like a child who has a picture-book given it'³² – so perhaps the annotated copy of Hazlitt was a present. No doubt, Forster would have been pleased to own a copy of Hazlitt annotated in detail by someone who had known him so well. He might even have shown the book off to Dickens, and, while this remains speculation, it seems highly likely that Dickens would at least have seen the actual review in the *Examiner*. In particular, his attention would surely have been drawn to the comparison Hunt makes between him and Hazlitt. In the review, Hunt quotes the following passage:

Some persons have expected to see his crimes written in the face of a murderer, and have been disappointed because they did not, as if this impeached the distinction between virtue and vice. Not at all. ...perfection in vice is not to be expected from the contradictory and mixed nature of our motives. Humanity is to be met in a den of robbers; nay, modesty in a brothel. ... Virtue may be said to steal, like a guilty thing, into the secret haunts of vice and infamy; it clings to their devoted victim, and will not be driven quite away. Nothing can destroy the human heart.

This, Hunt writes, is 'a very fine remark' and he then goes on to comment that 'the reader will recall the forcible illustration it has recently received in the admirable fiction of *Oliver Twist*'.³³ Finding his novel admired by Hunt and linked to Hazlitt would have been high praise for Dickens, and, in making his comparison, Hunt becomes the first reader to make the connection between Hazlitt and Dickens.

There are many other ways in which Forster's *Examiner* was the vehicle for an imaginative return to the Regency, notably as a response to contemporary politics. Forster did not become editor until 1847, but was editor in effect long before, as Albany Fonblanque gradually relinquished control of the journal. Forster later described how his position at the *Examiner* enabled him to publish Dickens's 'anonymous contribution to the fight the liberals were then making' against the return of a Tory administration under Robert Peel.³⁴ As the former Home Secretary under Hazlitt's old enemy, Lord Liverpool, Peel seemed to signal a return to the bad old days of the Regency. The *Examiner* published Dickens's 'The Fine Old English Gentleman' in 1841, the year of Peel's general election victory, one stanza of which referred to the fate of radical writers of the Regency period and the limits the government then placed on press freedom:

Those were the days for taxes, and for war's infernal din;
For scarcity of bread, that fine old dowagers might win;
For shutting men of letters up, through iron bars to grin,
Because they didn't think the Prince was altogether thin,
In the fine old English Tory times;
Soon may they come again!³⁵

The final two lines return as a refrain at the end of each verse, with minor changes. Ostensibly, they are a shot across the bows, a warning that England under Peel risks returning to the time of Peterloo and the Six Acts. However, 'The Fine Old English Gentleman' also betrays at a more conflicted stance. The nostalgia of the poem ('The good old laws...', 'The good old times...', 'In those rare days...')³⁶ is of course central to the poem's satire, but is perhaps not wholly ironic. Dickens is aware of the potential for regarding the Regency as a heroic period in literary history, when writers, not least in the pages of the *Examiner*, made their stand against government oppression. Forster thought it unlikely that Dickens 'ever enjoyed anything more than the power of thus taking part occasionally, unknown to outsiders, in the sharp conflict the press was waging at the time'.³⁷ This is an especially honest admission from Forster, given how much his politics had changed by the time he wrote his biography. As Davies writes, Forster's

private life became more and more sober and respectable ... his wealthy marriage, paid government post as Commissioner of Lunacy, and affluent life-style became a model for the literary man desiring social acceptability and status.³⁸

In re-printing 'The Fine Old English Gentleman' in his *Life of Dickens*, he made the decision to omit the stanza quoted on the previous page. By this point, Dickens's reference to 'shutting men of letters up' – a reference to the Hunt brothers' libel on the Prince Regent – no longer conformed to Forster's idea of literary respectability. However, in 1841, both Dickens and Forster were drawing on Hunt, Hazlitt and the legacy of Regency radicalism to attack the Tory interregnum of Peel. In the same year, Dickens wrote to Forster, 'By Jove, how radical I am getting! I wax stronger and stronger in the true principles every day'.³⁹ Given its heritage, and association with writers such as Hunt, Shelley and Hazlitt, the *Examiner* was the ideal forum to display this radicalism. Dickens and Forster's involvement in the *Examiner* suggests the extent to which they were steeped in the literary culture of the Regency. When Forster asked Hunt to review Hazlitt in the *Examiner*, he was trying to preserve, rather than Victorianize, Hazlitt's writings. And when Dickens published 'The Fine Old English Gentleman' in the *Examiner*, he used the return of Robert Peel's Tories as an occasion for castigating the Liverpool administration, but also for celebrating the role of Regency writers such as Hazlitt and Hunt in standing up to the actions of an oppressive government. Dickens's involvement in the *Examiner*, and his friendships with Hunt and Forster, is therefore important in establishing the context in which he read Hazlitt. The rest of this paper will suggest some of the effects this reading had on Dickens's novels and journalism.

London Characters and Plays

Both writers began their careers as Parliamentary reporters for the radical daily, the *Morning Chronicle*. Furthermore, having initially being extremely pleased to secure the job, the long hours and hard work of converting tedious debates into shorthand seems to have had the same effect: they both quickly became disillusioned with Parliament. Dickens expressed his early hopes through David Copperfield's friend Traddles: 'I hope, one of these days, to get connected with some newspaper: which would almost be the making of my fortune'.⁴⁰ However, it is left to Copperfield himself to discover the reality.

Night after night, I record predictions that never come to pass, professions that are never fulfilled, explanations that are only meant to mystify. I wallow in words. ... I am sufficiently behind the scenes to know the worth of political life. I am quite an Infidel about it, and shall never be converted.⁴¹

Hazlitt recorded his own disillusionment in *The Plain Speaker*:

You must serve an apprenticeship to a want of originality, to a suspension of thought and feeling. You are in a go-cart of prejudices, in a regularly constructed machine of pretexts and precedents; you ... [must] wear the livery of other men's thoughts ... A man of simplicity and independence of mind cannot easily reconcile himself to all this ... You are hemmed in, stifled, pinioned, pressed to death.

Appropriately for an essay 'On the Difference Between Writing and Speaking', Hazlitt slips between the impossible task faced by men of genius, like Burke, who stand up to speak in Parliament, and his own 'apprenticeship' of taking down debates in shorthand. In the development of both Hazlitt and Dickens's careers, the experience of and reaction to Parliament plays an important part. Parliament's arid, empty language and remoteness from ordinary lives is something both writers are continually writing against. After the empty theatrical posturing of Parliament, both writers moved on to writing drama reviews for the *Morning Chronicle*. And, on the London stage, they could closely observe the popular culture which they found throughout metropolitan life, diffused as a form of everyday theatricality.

Their celebration of metropolitan culture focussed on its democratic potential, which they placed in opposition to the narrowness and inauthenticity of parliamentary politics and established social distinctions. In 'On Vulgarly and Affectation', Hazlitt seeks to demonstrate how 'nearly allied'⁴² the two terms of his title are. 'Gentility' is described as 'the mere essence of spleen and affectation', revealed as simply 'a more select and artificial kind of vulgarity'. Hazlitt contrasts this affected, essentially vulgar idea of gentility with 'real power, real excellence':⁴³ 'nothing is vulgar that is natural, spontaneous, unavoidable',⁴⁴ 'nothing real, nothing original can be vulgar'.⁴⁵ Dickens's account of an exclusive, but false, concept of gentility closely follows Hazlitt's. Soon after David Copperfield arrives in London, he is introduced to London society at a dinner Agnes invites him to, which is presented as the ideal of gentility. During an evening of excruciating boredom, 'it occurred to me several times that we should have got on better, if we had not been quite so genteel'.⁴⁶

'Gentility' is closely allied to 'respectability', with both terms suggesting an artificial exclusivity. However, while the 'genteel' revolves around ideas of taste, the ironic use of 'respectable' is used by both writers to point to moral failings. In 'On Respectable People', Hazlitt argues that 'there is not any term that is oftener misapplied, or that is a stronger instance of the abuse of language, than this same word *respectable*'.⁴⁷ It fails to describe true worth, but is commonly attached to those who 'become rich for want of ideas, and powerful from want of principle'.⁴⁸ Again, this is suggestive of David Copperfield's sense of uneasiness when he encounters the faultless 'respectability'⁴⁹ of Steerforth's manservant, Littimer, who will become complicit in Steerforth's seduction of Em'ly. Hazlitt's essay goes on to argue that

The most mischievous and offensive use of this word has been in politics. By respectable people (in the fashionable cant of the day) are meant those who have not a particle of regard for any one but themselves, who have feathered their own nests, and only want to lie snug and warm in them. ... They are more affected by the overturning of a plate of turtle-soup than by the starving of a whole country.⁵⁰

Here, Hazlitt's anger anticipates Dickens's satire on Merdle and the Barnacles in *Little Dorrit*. The corrupt Barnacle family use the Circumlocution Office to perfect the art of 'How not to do it'⁵¹ and when 'A Shoal of Barnacles' are gathered, a string of terms is applied to the family – 'noble', 'distinguished', 'indefatigable', 'honourable', all with the same ironic effect as Hazlitt's use of 'respectable'.⁵² Indeed, Hazlitt's essay ironically comments on how 'a Member of Parliament is not only respectable but *honourable*'.⁵³ The Barnacle family's wilful blindness of everything they should know extends to the great capitalist Merdle: 'nobody knew with the least precision what Mr Merdle's business was, except that it was to coin money'.⁵⁴ Even Merdle's efforts in this direction are criticised by his wife, who insists that he 'care about nothing – or seem to care about nothing – as everybody else does'.⁵⁵ However uneasy he is in high society, his social position is finally determined by his wealth and Merdle's fate fulfils Hazlitt's observation that 'the city merchant never loses his respectability till he becomes a bankrupt. After that, we hear no more of it or him'.⁵⁶ False ideas of gentility and respectability link together the exclusive and essentially false distinctions found in contemporary culture, moral action and politics.

Hazlitt and Dickens attack false ideas of gentility and respectability by turning to everyday life and popular culture in London. In particular, the Cockney character is celebrated for its refusal to conform to received social categories, performing instead a hybrid identity, open to and imaginatively transforming its surroundings: for Hazlitt, 'a real Cockney is the poorest creature in the world, the most literal, the most mechanical, and yet he too lives in a world of romance – a fairy-land of his own',⁵⁷ while for Dickens it is 'this compound ... this shabby-gentility'.⁵⁸ Dickens's 'Shabby-Gentee People', an 1834 essay for the *Morning Chronicle*, repeatedly re-calls Hazlitt's 'On Londoners and Country People' and, while both were indisputably based on close observation, the similarities suggest Hazlitt's essay directly influenced Dickens's. Hazlitt writes that 'the true Cockney has never travelled beyond the purlieu of the Metropolis',⁵⁹ while Dickens opens with the statement that 'there are certain descriptions of people who, oddly enough, appear to appertain exclusively to the metropolis'.⁶⁰ Hazlitt imagines him 'to be a lawyers' clerk at half-a-guinea a week', familiar with 'the Inns of Court, the Temple Gardens, and Gray's-Inn Passage',⁶¹ while Dickens writes of how 'he may be a clerk of the lowest description, or a contributor to the press of the same grade'⁶² and describes

meeting 'a great many persons of this description in the neighbourhood of the Inns of Court'.⁶³ Of course, both writers are clearly drawing on their personal experience – of working as parliamentary reporters and living as itinerant, down-at-heel Londoners, free to enjoy the theatre and spectacle of the capital – yet the close similarities also suggest that Dickens is drawing directly on Hazlitt's essay.

Hazlitt's Cockney is proud, patriotic and lives in the moment. In *The Old Curiosity Shop*, Kit Nubbles fits this description as he tries to earn a sixpence from holding gentlemen's horses in the street: 'Kit walked about, now with quick steps and now with slow; now lingering ... and now darting at full speed up a bye street'.⁶⁴ Watching him, Mr Chuckster cannot 'make out whether he (Kit) was "precious raw" or "precious deep", but intimidated by a distrustful shake of the head, that he inclined to the latter opinion'.⁶⁵ Raw, distrusted by the genteel, Kit uncannily matches the profile given by Hazlitt in 'On Londoners and Country People': 'He is pert, raw, ignorant, conceited, ridiculous, shallow, contemptible. His senses keep him alive'.⁶⁶ However, despite this ignorance and lack of education, Londoners, such as Mr Micawber, are often shown to acquire a defiant sense of their own bookishness by brushing up against the broad, shared culture of urban life. Hazlitt's Cockney 'loves a play',⁶⁷ while Dickens describes being 'haunted by a shabby-genteel man' who

first attracted our notice, by sitting opposite to us in the reading-room at the British Museum; and what made the man more remarkable was, that he always had before him a couple of shabby-genteel books – two old dog's eared folios, in mould worm-eaten covers, which had once been smart.⁶⁸

Despite being without any kind of genteel education – and being more used to living on their nerves in the city – the Cockney character nonetheless possess an idiosyncratic relish for theatres and books.

Besides the theatre and British Museum, Hazlitt's Cockney 'loves a tea-garden ... or the Cider-Cellar.... This kind of suburban retreat is a most agreeable relief to the close and confined air of a city life'.⁶⁹ And similarly, Dickens's *Sunday Under Three Heads* pays attention to the Londoner who, having 'been confined' in 'close compartment' through the week, now 'sits in the tea garden of some famous tavern, and drinks his beer in content and comfort'.⁷⁰ These scenes of suburban pastoral highlight how the 'Cockney School' of writers was always defined by its remove from the pastoral of the Lake Poets – *Gold's London Magazine* described the Cockney Poets 'having been educated in the city, and taking their pictures of rural life from its immediate environs'.⁷¹ And this definition accurately describes the scene of Hazlitt's Cockney, which is only ever a bastardised version of pastoral, a suburban extension of the city, a liminal retreat and site of pleasure-seeking:

punch-bowls and lemons ... lime-trees or polars wave overhead.... Hampstead and Highgate are seen in the back-ground, and contain the imagination within gentle limits – here the holiday people are playing ball; here they are playing bowls – here they are quaffing ale, there sipping tea – here the loud wager is heard, there the political debate.⁷²

In *Sunday Under Three Heads*, Dickens describes the same scene, following a couple who 'are going to Hampstead or Highgate, to spend their holiday afternoon in some place where they can see the sky, the fields, the trees'.⁷³ Suburban retreats from the city feature throughout Dickens's novels – for example, in *The Old Curiosity Shop*, Kit Nubbles works in Finchley while waiting for Little Nell's return, and, in *Little Dorrit*, Arthur Clennam walks twelve miles each Saturday to Twickenham as part of an attempt to woo Pet Meagles. For Dickens, these suburban, low-grade pastoral locations are often the setting for his characters' romantic fantasies. In describing these places his writing deliberately falls into a repetitious, hackneyed mode. Kit is employed in 'a beautiful little cottage with a thatched roof and little spires at the gable-ends, and pieces of stained glass in some of the windows',⁷⁴ where he meets Barbara and becomes 'a very tolerable gardener'.⁷⁵ Mr Meagles's 'cottage-residence'

stood in a garden, no doubt as fresh and beautiful in the May of the year, as Pet now was in the May of her life; and it was defended by a goodly show of handsome trees and spreading evergreens, as Pet was by Mr and Mrs Meagles. It was made out of an old brick house, of which a part had been altogether pulled down, and another part had been changed into the present cottage; so there was a hale elderly portion, to represent Mr and Mrs Meagles, and a young picturesque, very pretty portion, to represent Pet.⁷⁶

In these descriptions Dickens almost seems at pains to make clear that this is not true pastoral but the bastardised version. Like the 'shabby-genteel', Dickens revels in the hybrid nature of these places, outside both city and country. The convivial scenes of taverns and tea-gardens, described in *Sunday Under Three Heads*, are transformed in his novels into domesticated, romantic visions of pastoral. In doing so, his fiction seeks to enact the urban fantasy of the country, the Londoners' idea of what might surround the city, and his style performs a clichéd, debased form of pastoral.

Jon Cook's assessment on how Hazlitt 'comes close to a sentimental defence of a popular culture that is regarded with condescension by the refined',⁷⁷ could equally be applied to the suburban settings of Dickensian romance. There is something deeply sentimental about both writers' representations of London – which is, no doubt, one part of Hazlitt's attraction for Dickens. However, in both writers, the sentimental never precludes acute social observation, critical analysis or political commitment. For Dickens, the amusements of ordinary Londoners was a contemporary political issue he was determined to influence. His 1836 pamphlet *Sunday Under Three Heads* was written as a defence of the ordinary Londoners' Sunday, threatened by the Bill for the Better Observance of Sunday, which was brought before Parliament by Sir Andrew Agnew four times but never passed into law. Besides his sentimental defence of popular culture, Dickens's pseudonymous pamphlet goes through Agnew's Bill, analysing individual clauses in detail and demonstrating how they would not affect the rich, but were aimed solely at the poor. In 1836, the right of ordinary Londoners to collect in a suburban tea-garden on a Sunday was a source of political controversy as well as sentimental celebration.

Similarly, the theatre, the defining feature of metropolitan culture, is the cause of sentiment in both writers, but also of much more. Both gave the theatre a central position in their representations of London, describing its lasting effect on the lives of Londoners. Hazlitt's 'On Actors and Acting' describes drama as 'the source of the greatest enjoyment at the time, and a never-failing fund of agreeable reflection afterwards',⁷⁸ while, after Kit's trip to Astley's in *The Old Curiosity Shop*, Dickens re-calls Hazlitt at his most elegiac and aphoristic: 'we are all going to the play, or coming home from it'.⁷⁹ In his 1846 speech to the General Theatrical Fund, Dickens quotes from 'On Actors and Acting': 'Hazlitt has well said that "There is no class of society whom so many people regard with affection as actors. We greet them on the stage, we like to meet them in the streets; they almost always recall to us pleasant associations."⁸⁰ In preparing his speech Dickens had returned to Hazlitt's two essays 'On Actors and Acting', collected in *The Round Table*, and four years later the influence of these essays can again be seen in 'The Amusements of the People', a two-part essay Dickens wrote for *Household Words*. Hazlitt describes how actors 'live from hand to mouth: they plunge from want into luxury ... Chilled with poverty, steeped in contempt',⁸¹ and Dickens similarly writes of how the actor 'grinds hard at his vocation, is often steeped in direful poverty, and lives, at the best, in a little world of mockeries'.⁸² Dickens qualifies his 'vast respect for county magistrates, and for the lord chamberlain' with its 'greater deference' to actors, 'who will outlive the whole existing court and commission'.⁸³ Likewise, Hazlitt argues that it is 'pleasanter' to see actors 'than any of the three learned professions. We feel more respect for John Kemble in a plain coat, than for the Lord Chancellor on the wool-sack'.⁸⁴ Dickens only diverges from 'On Actors and Acting' in discussing the contrast between role and reality. In a way that is characteristic of the movement of a Hazlitt essay, 'On Actors and Acting' finishes with a celebration of the often miserable existence of the strolling-player: it is 'the transition from their real to their assured characters, from the contempt of the world to the applause of the multitude, that gives its zest.... It is rags and a flock-bed which give their splendour to a plume of feathers and a throne'.⁸⁵ However, while 'The Amusements of the People' similarly describes the space between the life of an actor and the roles he performs – 'to give away a great estate six nights a week, and want a shilling; to preside at imaginary banquets, hungry for a mutton chop'⁸⁶ – Dickens never goes on to argue that it is this gulf between the life and the role that gives 'zest' to an actor's life. Dickens frequently added the weight of his reputation to projects designed to support poor or retired actors, such as the General Theatrical

Fund. However sentimental his defence of popular culture, he never tries to varnish over the reality of actors' lives.

Both writers also pay attention to the role of theatre as, in Dickens's phrase, 'a means of public instruction'.⁸⁷ However, this is never narrowly didactic, as argued in 'On Actors and Acting' – drama 'stamps the image of virtue on the mind ... by a sense of pleasure. It regulates the passions by giving a loose to the imagination', and the display of 'seductive vices' can have the effect of 'inoculating the mind'.⁸⁸ Dickens agrees with Hazlitt here, as he watches his typical member of the audience and, by the end of the evening, 'discerned in the countenance of Mr Whelks a sufficient confusion between right and wrong to last him for one night'.⁸⁹ Letting the imagination play on both virtue and vice can be beneficial, but both writers move on from instruction to amusement – in Hazlitt, 'if the stage is useful as a school of instruction, it is no less so as a source of amusement'⁹⁰ – and in Dickens, 'we will add that we believe these people have a right to be amused'.⁹¹ This line would soon be immortalized in *Hard Times*, when Sleary, the circus owner, tells Gradgrind, 'people muht be amuthed'.⁹² Popular culture, a mix of everything from Shakespeare to circus horses, is valued by both writers as a site of resistance to Utilitarian thought, and Sleary's mantra perhaps owes something to Hazlitt's essays 'On Actors and Acting'.

More pervasively, the theatricality of popular culture saturates Dickens's novels, peopled almost exclusively by actors and audiences. His technique of observation views London as one great theatre, and transforms its inhabitants into actors and spectators. To take one example – which is also useful in showing how Dickens's magpie imagination operates, ever alert for character traits he could use and re-use – in 1834 he describes the shabby-genteel man who sat opposite him in the British Museum eating his dinner:

About two o'clock, you would see him munching a French roll or penny loaf; not taking it boldly out of his pocket at once, like a man who knew he was only making lunch; but breaking off little bits in his pocket, and eating them by stealth. He knew too well it was his dinner.⁹³

Dickens's essay on 'Shabby-Genteel People' makes this figure its central performer, yet almost twenty years later the same man can return as a member of the audience. In *David Copperfield*, the court of Doctors' Commons becomes another kind of theatre for the shabby-genteel Londoner, with a 'public, represented by a boy with a comforter, and a shabby-genteel man secretly eating crumbs out of his coat pockets'.⁹⁴ From the observed to the observer, Hazlitt again anticipates Dickens in his essay on 'Londoner and Country People', describing how the Cockney 'lives in the eye of the world, and the world in his'.⁹⁵ The same shabby-genteel Londoner can switch between the roles of star performer and audience member, suggesting the ideas of theatricality which continually underpin both writers' work.

Frequently, the comedy and pathos of Dickens's novels revolve around the way characters act out their own plays, transforming the social roles of themselves and those around them. The figure of the Lord Chancellor features throughout *David Copperfield*, in the characters' grandiose ambitions and delusions. Traddles tells David how his life would change 'if I was Lord Chancellor',⁹⁶ Betsey Trotwood tells David that Mr Dick 'is memorialising the Lord Chancellor'.⁹⁷ and Mrs Micawber is concerned that by working as a clerk Mr Micawber will not prevent himself from becoming 'a Judge, or even say a Chancellor'.⁹⁸ In *Bleak House*, Miss Flite's wits are turned by living too close to Chancery and attending court every day. Her delusions re-write the inscrutable narratives of Chancery law, until she believes the Chancellor is paying her to attend court:

'Every Saturday Conversation Kenge, or Guppy (clerk to Conversation K.), places in my hand a paper of shillings Always the same number in the paper From whence do these papers come, you say? That is the great question. Naturally, Shall I tell you what I think? I think ... that the Lord Chancellor ... forwards them.... So delicate! Attending Court the other day—I attend it regularly—with my documents—I taxed him with it, and he almost confessed. That is, I smiled at him from my bench, and *he* smiled at me from his bench'.⁹⁹

In these repeated delusions about the Lord Chancellor, Dickens alludes to Hazlitt's description, in 'On Londoners and Country People', of how every lawyer's clerk, however poor, 'has advanced within half-a-dozen yards of the Chancellor's chair: – who can doubt that he understands (by implication) every point of law (however intricate) better than the most expert country practitioner?'¹⁰⁰ Through watching the spectacle of London and living in close proximity to its performers, Londoners end up acting out roles far removed from their own reality. Dickens's handling of this class of characters wavers between pathos and admiration. Delusions about the Lord Chancellor can drive you mad, like Miss Flite and Mr Dick, or they can, like Mr Micawber, make you successful – if only after leaving London and emigrating to Australia.

However, it would be wrong to claim that Hazlitt and Dickens's response to the theatricality of metropolitan life, which crosses from the stage into the everyday, is confined to an amused, occasionally pathetic, sense of affection. Instead, Dickens follows Hazlitt in delineating the imagination's appetite for power, most clearly revealed in drama, but observed throughout city life. The kind of power that Hazlitt finds when watching Edmund Kean play Iago, 'great intellectual activity, accompanied by a total want of moral principle', has a magnetising effect on the audience, drawing them closer and revealing 'a natural tendency in the mind to strong excitement'.¹⁰¹ This magnetic, amoral excitement was famously described by Dickens as the 'attraction of repulsion', a phrase which reoccurs with slight variation throughout his work. In writing of Uriah Heep, for example, *David Copperfield* describes how 'I was attracted to him in very repulsion'.¹⁰² Hazlitt's 'Hot and Cold' shows that he understood how attraction and repulsion could easily be brought together, when he makes the analogy between the 'morally indecent', produced by a 'conflict between temptation and duty', and the 'physically revolting', which 'is the product of alternate attraction and repulsion'.¹⁰³ In showing how the theatrical, urban imagination is drawn to objects of great power, both writers are in part responding to a fascination with the power of spectacle which had been crystallised in the popular imagination by the French Revolution. For example, Hazlitt's essay 'On Coriolanus', which discovers political truths in the irresistible draw of the Roman general, might be read alongside *A Tale of Two Cities*, in which Charles Darnay's trials, both in London and revolutionary Paris, present justice as a theatrical, melodramatic spectacle.

However, while this understanding might at first be seen to qualify Hazlitt and Dickens's celebration of metropolitan culture, it also helps to explain their continual fascination with London and its theatre. Indeed, both writers recognise the imagination's appetite for power as central to their own writing. Dickens's variously described ideas of energy and continual motion match Hazlitt's idea of *gusto*: according to the opening sentence of 'On Gusto', '*gusto* in art is power or passion defining any object'.¹⁰⁴ It is Dickens's allegiance to this 'power or passion', which he perceives as central to his art, that separates him from *David Copperfield*'s mature acceptance of conventional domesticity. It also distances him from Forster's more respectable ideas of literature, as shown in an 1857 letter, in which Dickens tells Forster, 'you are not so tolerant as perhaps you might be on the wayward and unsettled feeling which is part (I suppose) of the tenure on which one holds an imaginative life'.¹⁰⁵ The letter goes on to broach the subject of the public readings which Forster so strongly disapproved of. However, to Dickens, these displays of energy are a natural continuation of his work, an opportunity to theatrically perform his novels before his readers. Like Hazlitt, his pervasive sense of theatricality is not confined to the city he describes but also encompasses his own idea of his work. Critics of both writers have been attentive to this feature of their writing – for example, in commenting on the headline of *Household Words*, Ackroyd writes how the 'the sense of the conductor is close to his continual interest in stage-management, as if the nation were a vast theatre for each week's performance of *Household Words*',¹⁰⁶ and Jon Cook describes how Hazlitt's

fascination with drama as a form carried over into his capacity to treat writing as the occasion for theatrical forms of self-representation. It was another consequence of his being continually before his public, like an actor performing nightly on a stage.¹⁰⁷

The reference to 'being continually before his public' of course refers to Hazlitt working within the medium of journalism, and the sense of immediacy and closeness to an audience which this confers. With his continual forays into newspapers and periodicals – as well as the publication of his novels in serial form, which necessitated frequent, tight deadlines – Dickens understood this aspect of Hazlitt's work well. Journalism and theatre remain closely entwined within their particular strand of urban Romanticism, with their shared emphasis on performance, audience and the discipline of meeting deadlines or stepping

onto a stage – alternately terrifying and liberating. Forster tried to dissuade Dickens from giving public readings, viewing them as a threat to literary respectability. However, in reading his work before his public, Dickens best expressed the ‘restless disposition’¹⁰⁸ which always features in contemporary descriptions of his character. In his writings on Kean and essays ‘On Actors and Acting’, Hazlitt showed that he understood this kind of character well. ‘An actor to be a good one, must have a great spirit of enjoyment in himself, strong impulses, strong passions, and a strong sense of pleasure: for it is business to imitate the passions, and to communicate pleasure to others.’¹⁰⁹

Linacre College, Oxford

The 2008 Elian Birthday Toast

By DICK WATSON

The 2008 Elian Birthday Lunch was held on Saturday, 9 February at the Royal College of General Practitioners, South Kensington, London.

IN COMMON WITH MANY PEOPLE, I have been thinking a good deal about privacy recently: it has been in the forefront of our minds, either as a serious question of personal identity and confidentiality, or as a comic episode caused by the desire of the French President to marry a beautiful model and keep the whole thing private. In contemplating these newsworthy events I recalled Lamb's reaction to the visit of Sarah Wesley and Elizabeth Ogilvy Benger that Seamus Perry reminded us of a few years ago. In April 1800, these ladies invaded Charles and Mary Lamb's lodging, and bossed him about: 'a tribe of authoresses that come after you here daily', as he told Coleridge. Sometimes he put up with such invasions for the sake of the story that he would be able to tell afterwards, as when George Dyer brought the Earl of Buchan to see him:

Dyer has at last met with a madman more mad than himself – the Earl of Buchan.... This old man of near eighty is come to London in his way to France, & George & he go about every where -. George brought the mad Lord up to see me – I wa'nt at home but Mary was washing – a pretty pickle to receive an Earl in! Lord have mercy upon us a Lord in my Garratt!

Some of this desire for privacy must have been to protect Mary, not just from being discovered at the wash-tub but from interruptions to their existence that might be disturbing. But it must go deeper than that, and be part of Lamb's own protective carapace. He had many friends and colleagues, and valued them, as we know; his card-playing parties were famous occasions, and he had a genius for friendship, as his letters to Coleridge and Manning and others show. But he was anxious about how he might be seen in public, which is one reason why he reacted so strongly when Coleridge published 'This Lime-Tree Bower My Prison' in Southey's *Annual Anthology* in 1800:

in the next edition... please to blot out *gentle hearted* , and substitute drunken dog, ragged-head, seld-shaven, odd-ey'd, stuttering, or any other epithet... Damn you, I was beginning to forgive you, & believe in earnest that the lugging in of my Proper name was purely unintentional on your part, when looking back for further conviction, stares me in the face Charles Lamb of the *India House*. Now I am convinced it was all done in Malice, heaped, sack-upon-sack, congregated, studied Malice.

This is Lamb in teasing mode, of course. He may well have been delighted to find himself in Southey's anthology, described as this gentle-hearted nature-lover on holiday. He knew that Coleridge would know that this was said in fun. I wonder, though, whether matters were more complex than this. In the first place, Lamb was being associated with his place of work, and he might well have been sensitive about that, either because his colleagues there would think of him differently; or because he might be in trouble for bringing the India House into the poetical papers, much as one used to be in trouble for writing to the newspapers on departmental notepaper; or because he might have wanted to think of himself as a poet and writer rather than a clerk in the India House, in the same way as Wordsworth disliked being thought of as a Distributor of Stamps or the writer of a guide to the Lake District.

Above all, perhaps, it was – by naming him – taking possession of him for the purposes of the poem, willy-nilly, that Lamb may have objected to. He was particularly sensitive, I think, to what might be called 'involuntary possession'. It is one of those features of his behaviour and his

writing that particularly endears him to us. Remember the staid-looking gentleman, about the wrong side of thirty, who got in to the coach between Bishopsgate and Shacklewell, and proceeded, after some preliminary conversation, to bombard Lamb with facts and figures, and to ask him questions that he could not answer, such as what was the value of the rental of all the retail shops in London. As he was descending from the coach, quizzing another passenger, the truth flashed upon Lamb that he was a schoolmaster, but not before he had become the archetype of the person one does not want to meet on a bus or a plane or a railway train.

It is curious to see how this works out in the essays, in which people are often referred to by an initial followed by a long dash, as in 'Grace before meat', where we read that 'C----- holds that a man cannot have a pure mind who refuses apple-dumplings'. Or the 'catalogue of Grecians' in 'Christ's Hospital, Five and Thirty Years ago', where we find droll squinting W-----, and poor S-----, and ill-fated M-----, and C.V. Le G-----, and many others. Even George Dyer appears as 'D.' or 'G.D.' in 'Oxford in the Vacation'. And Lamb, of course, appears himself as 'L' in the Christ's Hospital essay.

I think that there is an essay to be written, and an enquiry to be made, into why Lamb sometimes uses full names, as in 'The South-Sea House' and 'Captain Jackson', and sometimes not; and why he himself used the word Elia, and 'Caragnulus' (or 'Charles Lambkin') for himself; and why, according to Peter George Patmore, Lamb gave up wearing what Wordsworth called the 'homely russet brown' of the poet: 'Lamb did not like to be taken for a poet, or for any thing else; so, latterly, he always dressed in a way to be taken, by ninety-nine people out of a hundred who looked at him, for a Methodist preacher'. It is all part of a character that many of us would find sympathetic: it suggests a sensitivity, a certain shyness, a regard for the privacy of himself and others, that is not much in accord with some modern manifestations of a publicity-conscious age. I like to think that today we can celebrate that sensitivity, and tact, as well as good humour and good will. It is in that spirit that I invite you to rise and drink the toast to THE IMMORTAL MEMORY OF CHARLES LAMB.

Filming Lamb's *Tales*

By GEORGE LESLIE IRONS

'...LIKE THE SCENES OF A MOVING PANTOMINE'. Lamb's enthusiastic description of the Strand in 'The Londoner' (*Works*, 1818) would, today, equally well apply to Church Street, Edmonton. As I stood in the garden of Lamb's Cottage, watching the parade of London busses and cars, people hurrying to work and mothers taking their children to school, I wondered if Charles Lamb, looking out of the parlour window, would not have preferred Church Street as it is today to that of the secluded country lane of his time. But I was not here to muse on the past....

The Project

It was after the performance of Lamb's *Tales* at St. Sepulchre's Church, Newgate Street, (see *Bulletin* No 113, page 36, January, 2001) that David Wickham first presented me with his idea of making a film of the play. From then on he mentioned it to me on a number of occasions, until, at the Society's birthday luncheon in 2006 he issued an injunction to the effect that I should arrange a meeting with Nick Powell to discuss the proposal as soon as possible, adding (quite unnecessarily, I thought) that, after all, I was not getting any younger!

When I was told that the Council of The Charles Lamb Society was prepared to sponsor the film of Lamb's *Tales* as a permanent record of the play, I, at first, thought that the intention was to film a live stage performance. However, when Nick Powell phoned me to discuss the project, I realised that something more ambitious was desired. The script was to be that of the one-man stage play, unaltered, but the entire play was to be performed and filmed on location in (and around) Lamb's Cottage in Edmonton. Stage plays normally have to be rewritten and restructured before they can be effectively transferred to film; was it possible to present a one-man performance as, what is in effect, a ninety minute feature film shot within the confines of a small room in a cottage?

So, it was not with a great deal of optimism I sent the script to film director Nigel Sizer for his opinion. Two weeks later I received a phone call from his studio to say that he liked the script and thought that it could be effectively filmed in the style of Alan Bennett's 'Talking Heads', and that he would be pleased to direct it at Lamb's cottage if the location proved suitable. It did! The director was happy. However, I was not quite so happy when I was told that, due to intrusive traffic noises from Church Street, my voice would have to be recorded using a radio microphone attached to my costume, but this was a concession I was prepared to make for the privilege of filming in Lamb's Cottage. So, we were in business!

The present owners of Lamb's Cottage, Sandra Knott and George Wilcox, had kindly given their permission for Lamb's *Tales* to be filmed there over a period of three days. This would be preceded by three days of rehearsals and camera, costume and sound checks at the film studio.

Filming at Lamb's Cottage

Lamb's Cottage is, in fact, quite a large house, with nine rooms spread over three stories. When we arrived on the first day of filming, I paused at the gate to look at the cottage, and I was struck by how closely it resembled the contemporary drawings extant from Lamb's time. As we entered the cottage we were given the warmest of welcomes – Sandra and George are well known for their hospitality. We were also aware that a great honour was being bestowed upon us as,

hitherto, they had rejected all requests from TV companies to film in their home.

Whilst all the equipment and props were being brought into the house, Sandra took me up to my dressing room, a charming little bedroom just at the top of the main staircase. While I was getting into my costume I began to wonder who had occupied the room when Charles and Mary resided at the cottage. I then went down to the parlour, a little room next to the front door where Lamb had once greeted his visitors, which was to be my greenroom for the duration of the filming. I happened to glance out of the window and saw that the camera was being set up in the front garden and that George appeared to be planting two large 'property' (artificial) rose bushes near the front door.

Madeleine, the young lady responsible for continuity and 'the book' (script) came in to say that it would be half an hour before I was to be called, so I wandered along the passage to the dining room which was to be the setting for the film. As I pushed open the door I was immediately transported back to 1834. So powerful was the impression of this upon me that it would hardly be an exaggeration to say that I almost expected to see Charles walk in behind me with a taper to light the candles; the room is, to this day, still lit solely by candlelight. As I looked around the room – so evocative of the life once shared there by Charles and Mary Lamb – my gaze fell on the little door at the side of the fireplace which opened into a large, built-in cupboard, in which, when the cottage was a private asylum, it is said, patients were sometimes confined. Sandra had told me that there is a mystery surrounding the cupboard. Apparently the back wall of the cupboard does not tally with the walls of the house, leaving a large, boxed in area unaccounted for. I wondered if the cupboard had originally been twice its present size – or, was it perhaps... but my speculation was cut short for I was being called for an outside shot with one of George's rose bushes.

My next call was back to the dining room, now almost unrecognisable as the room I had been in earlier. A large part of the room was taken up with two lighting rigs surrounded by all the paraphernalia needed for filming. I turned round to view my set – a small area between the door and the fireplace, furnished with a table and two chairs. Condensing the action of the play into this tiny space was going to be quite a challenge. I stepped out into the passage to await my cue. Eventually I heard Madeleine's voice saying, 'Scene nineteen – take one', followed by the snap of the clapper board and the director's voice saying, 'Camera rolling – and – action!'. The filming of Lamb's *Tales* was under way!

Three days (and several hundred takes) later we heard the words so beloved of poor, overworked actors, 'It's a wrap!' and the filming of Lamb's *Tales* had ended. However, one last, and most important, take remain to be included – a still shot of the oil portrait of Charles Lamb's father, originally owned by Lamb and mentioned in 'Old Benchers of the Inner Temple', which had recently been given to the Society by John Moxon and Anne Powell (direct descendants of Emma Isola and Edward Moxon – see *Bulletin* No. 135, July, 2006) which is featured in the film. Also, the voice of 'Charlie' the cat had to be recorded for the opening scene. Encouraged by George (with a tin of his favourite biscuits) Charlie gave a truly bravura performance. That concluded our work in Lamb's Cottage.

When all of the equipment had been taken out to the van, we thanked Sandra and George for their kindness, assistance, and support throughout the filming, with especial gratitude for the delicious lunches, teas and cups of coffee so generously supplied.

The Editing

The vicissitudes of film making are well known, so when the deadline for completion came, and went, I was not unduly worried. But then the second deadline was missed – and the third! It was now ten months overdue, and still the prevarication continued. Obviously there were serious

problems at the film studio, and when we were told that the director had now become ill and was unable to continue, for the present, with editing work, Nick Powell and I jointly decided that we should seek to obtain the rushes of the film without delay, and make other arrangements for the completion of the film. After some delicate negotiations with the film company, we managed to reach an agreement and the rushes were secured. Now all we needed was an editor. By a stroke of good fortune (I am tempted to claim serendipity!), I had just met Jeremy Brettingham at a party and discovered he is a highly respected film editor. After being apprised of our predicament he said he would view the rushes (six hours of takes) to see what could be done. Although each take had been carefully marked and numbered on the clapper board, the production notes which indicate the order of assembly (takes are never filmed in sequence) had gone missing. Fortunately all the takes containing dialogue could be put in sequence from the script; but that still left many unrelated shots for which we had little, or no, indication of the director's intended use. However, after making a careful selection of interesting shots Jeremy was able to construct an imaginative and attractive opening sequence as well as assembling a colourful little cameo spot in the scene with the roses. Other smaller, relevant inserts were introduced, where appropriate, to the story. There is no doubt that Jeremy's skilful and artistic use of the available material has greatly enhanced the film, as has the gentle incidental music played by Jane Wells.

Editor's Note: It is with chagrin and regret that I acknowledge Mr. Irons's last name has been misspelled, twice, previously, in the *Bulletin*. We are certainly enormously grateful for his efforts with the film and, in particular, with the exceptional determination he demonstrated, despite the significant obstacles he describes above.

Society Notes and News from Members

CHAIRMAN'S NOTES

We were very sad to receive news of the death of Professor Ian Jack, who was President of the Society from 1970 to 1980 and remained one of our honorary Vice-Presidents up until his death. A tribute by our current President appears below.

There are a few reminders that I need to give to members. First, please book now for the afternoon seminar on 4 December, of which particulars were sent out with the last number of the *Bulletin*. Tickets, costing £5 each, are available from Cecilia Powell at 28 Grove Lane, London, SE5 8ST. This will possibly be the last opportunity for the Society to visit the historic rooms at Albemarle Street belonging to John Murray, and it is an opportunity not to be missed. A good programme of speakers has been put together, and we shall be marking the bicentenary of publication of *Mrs Leicester's School* and *The Adventures of Ulysses*. Do come!

Secondly, tickets are also available from the same address for the Birthday Celebration Luncheon to be held on Saturday 7 February. Again, full particulars were included with the last number of the *Bulletin*.

Thirdly, quite a lot of members have still not paid this year's subscription. If you are one of these (please check your own records if you are uncertain), I shall be grateful if you would send me a cheque as soon as possible.

A large contingent of members attended the usual most enjoyable Friends of Coleridge Study Weekend at Kilve Court in early September on a weekend which was not *quite* as windy and rainy as feared. It was a fascinating programme, devoted to 'Coleridge's Religious Imagination'. A few photographs of the group visit to Alfoxden appear on the Friends website, together with (if you succeed in locating them) lines written by the Study Weekend's organiser, our member Shirley Watters, as a challenge to the participants, and the response to her challenge from yours truly!

DICK WATSON HAS CONTRIBUTED THE FOLLOWING RECOLLECTION OF IAN JACK:

BORN IN 1923, IAN JACK WAS EDUCATED AT George Watson's College, Edinburgh, the University of Edinburgh, and Merton College, Oxford (D. Phil., 1950). He became a Lecturer and then a Research Fellow at Brasenose College, Oxford, before moving to Pembroke College, Cambridge, in 1961, where he became successively Lecturer, Reader and then Professor until his retirement in 1989. His early reputation was made by *Augustan Satire* (1952), followed by the ground-breaking *Keats and the Mirror of Art* (1967), and a perceptive central study of Browning, *Browning's Major Poetry* (1973). In later years he became a renowned specialist in Browning, editing the early volumes in the Clarendon Press series of the poet's work. He was elected a Fellow of the British Academy in 1986.

I first met him in 1963, not long after his move to Cambridge, when he came to Glasgow as External Examiner. Peter Alexander, then on the edge of retirement, aged 70 (Scottish Professors went on longer than English ones) invited my wife and me to dinner with Ian in the College Club, a dismal basement underneath the University Chapel. I had only recently been appointed as a 'Temporary Assistant', and my wife was a third-year medical student. The Club, which was enlivened at lunchtime by the presence of people, was deserted on a rainy June evening; we were nervous, Ian was nervous, Peter Alexander was elderly and benign but distant, and I remember the evening as one that could best be described as sticky. I had not then learned how to handle those occasions: I could have at least asked him about his volume in the *Oxford History of English Literature* covering the years 1815-1832, which was published in that year. Perhaps I did; I cannot now remember. After that, however, we met occasionally, and exchanged greetings from time to time: I remember that he told a story about my Professor at Leicester, Arthur Humphreys, when he and Ian were on a lecture tour of India together. It had been a long and

tiring tour; Arthur had given a lecture in a stifflingly hot lecture room, and was politely listening to a long and rambling statement-cum-question afterwards when he fell gently asleep; Ian, sitting in the front row, had to pretend to have a kind of fit, during which he banged Arthur on the ankle, and saved the day. We continued to have occasional contact: he sent me a generous card of congratulation and encouragement when I was appointed to Durham; and one of my glad thoughts on becoming President of the Society was that I was deeply honoured to be succeeding such people as Ian Jack, John Stevens and John Beer.

The 1815-1832 volume of the *Oxford History* was an awkward one to handle, because, as the preface pointed out, the author was allowed to make only incidental references to Blake, Crabbe, Jane Austen, Wordsworth, Coleridge, and Southey, who had appeared in the previous volume. Ian did the job in masterly fashion, writing on Clare, Scott, Peacock, Galt, Hazlitt, Lamb, and De Quincey (and a host of other writers, such as James Morier and John Banim, of whom most people had never heard). The chapter on Lamb is a fascinating one. At first I thought it lacking in warmth: it seemed to neglect the opportunity to enjoy Lamb's wit and fun, that quintessential element of laughter and good-fellowship that shines in his letters and which is so beautifully tempered by the seriousness that is also found there. But I have come to admire the chapter more and more for its judicious estimate of Lamb, and for its placing of him in the company of the great prose writers who were his contemporaries. 'He came to see that his escape from Coleridge had been essential', Jack wrote: 'otherwise he might have continued to be towed along in his wake, unable to discover his own identity'. His description of the letters is brief, but sharp and to the point: 'they are unmethodical letters, fanciful, ironical, courageous, punning, mischievous, aptly phrased, human'. Of the *Essays of Elia* he wrote: 'In nothing is Lamb more characteristic of his age than in the way in which he seeks inspiration in his past life, and particularly in his memories of childhood'. In a perceptive paragraph, he pointed out Lamb's debt to Sterne, 'a master of the processes of the human heart from whom he learned a great deal'.

Peter Ustinov, when he was Chancellor of the University of Durham, often talked in his graduation addresses of the importance of respect – 'not love, which is a word used too easily, but respect'. I think that this is the key to Ian Jack's approach to Lamb. He clearly admired Lamb, but his chapter in the *Oxford History* did more than demonstrate that admiration. It showed respect for a writer whom he assessed carefully, from whose work he selected the best for praise. Let his words, the last in the chapter, speak for themselves. They are on 'The Superannuated Man', the essay that Jack described as 'the only masterpiece among the later of the *Last Essays*': 'it stands as a fitting epilogue to an incomparable series of essays which have always, as their deepest and truest theme, the character of Elia himself'.

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