Leigh Hunt
Life, Poetics, Politics

Edited by Nicholas Roe

ROUTLEDGE STUDIES IN ROMANTICISM

Leigh Hunt

The life of the poet, critic and journalist Leigh Hunt spanned the Romantic and Victorian eras. His influence in both periods was farreaching–Hunt encouraged poets such as Keats, Shelley, Tennyson and D.G.Rossetti; his reviews of the London stage opened the way for the theatrical criticism of Coleridge, Hazlitt and Lamb; his editorship of the *Examiner* (1808–22) was a high point in English journalism; his campaigning on liberal issues (which brought him a prison sentence) marks him out as one of the great reformers of the age. His poetry initiated a playful counter-Romanticism; his *Autobiography* (1850) is the first modern example of the genre.

This timely collection of essays by scholars and critics of international standing explores Hunt's controversial life, writings and politics over the full length of his career, enabling readers to appreciate the brilliance and variety of his achievements. Contents include:

- Leigh Hunt's *Foliage:* a Cockney manifesto
- Suburb sinners: sex and disease in the Cockney School
- Cockney chivalry: Hunt, Keats and the aesthetics of excess
- Leigh Hunt and Romantic spontaneity
- Interviews and recollections, 1832–1921

William Hazlitt said that Leigh Hunt 'improves upon acquaintance'. This book introduces Hunt to new generations of readers and argues for the recognition of Hunt's vital significance to British intellectual and literary culture in the Romantic and Victorian periods.

Nicholas Roe is Professor of English at the University of St Andrews, Scotland. His books include *John Keats and the Culture of Dissent* (1997) and, as editor, *Keats and History* (1995) and *Samuel Tailor Coleridge and the Sciences of Life* (2001).

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Leigh Hunt

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L. H. was our spiritual grandfather, a free man.

Virginia Woolf

Dislike mountains, can't bear height

Leigh Hunt

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Preface and acknowledgements

Leigh Hunt, poet, critic and journalist, outlived his illustrious friend Lord Byron by so many decades that his long life (1784–1859) spanned the Romantic and Victorian eras. His influence in both periods was far-reaching. He encouraged poets like Keats and Shelley, Tennyson and D.G.Rossetti. His reviews of the London stage opened the way for theatrical criticism by Coleridge, Hazlitt and Lamb; his enthusiasm for Italian arts had a comparably fertile effect on the Pre-Raphaelites. Hunt's editorship of the *Examiner* (1808–22) is a high point in English journalism, and his campaigning on liberal issues–which brought him a prison sentence–marks him out as one of the great reformers. His poetry is playful, sparkling, controversial, while his *Autobiography* (1850) is the first modern example of the genre. Poets have learned much from him. John Keats found his voice by following Hunt's example. Elizabeth Barrett remarked admiringly that Hunt's poetry makes us 'feel & see'; Robert Browning emulated his informal *brio*. Virginia Woolf identified Hunt as 'spiritual grandfather' of the modern world. John Betjeman and Philip Larkin adapted the domestic, suburban milieu and language of his poems.

The chapters in this book explore Hunt's extraordinary multi-faceted career, investigating his poetry, politics and life. A variety of approaches is represented, including close reading, historical contextualisation and biographical research. William Hazlitt said in *The Spirit of the Age* (1825) that Leigh Hunt 'improves upon acquaintance'; *Leigh Hunt: Life, Poetics, Politics* restores Hunt to rightful prominence.

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Nicholas Roe

Abbreviations

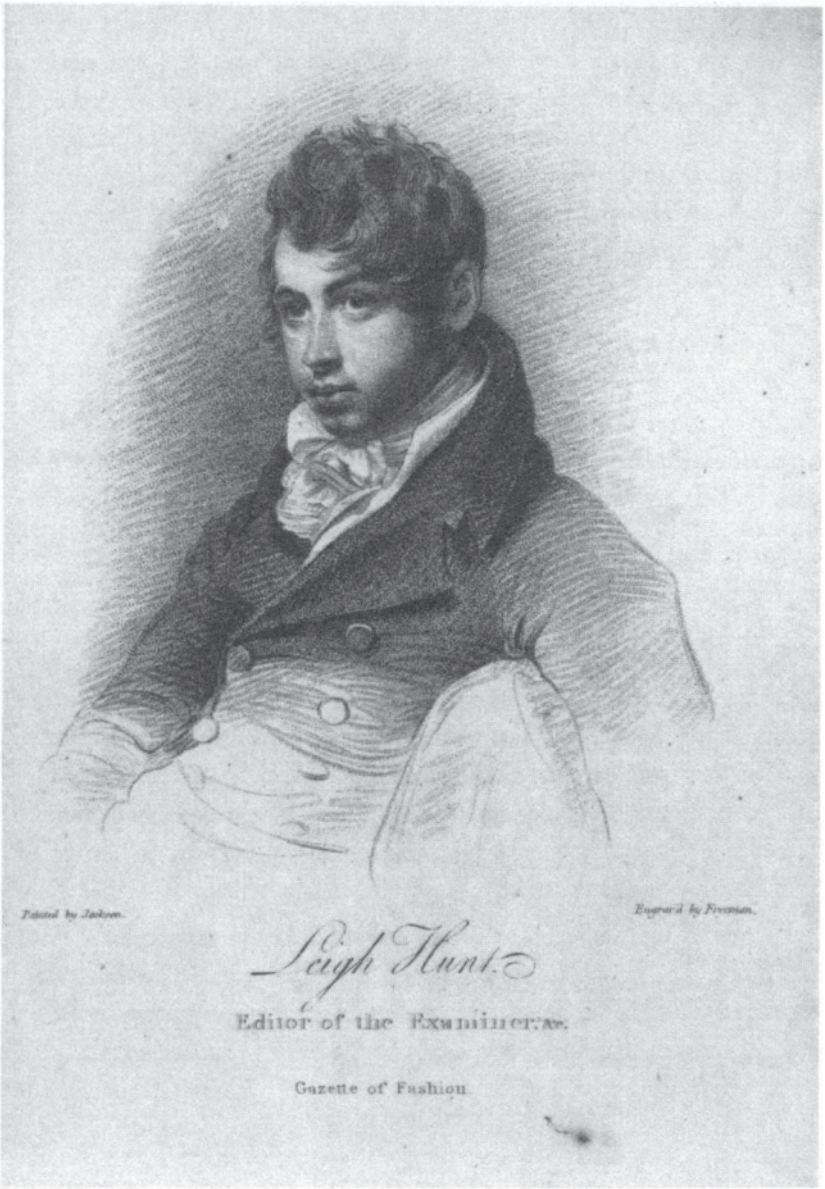
Autobiography	*The Autobiography of Leigh Hunt* (3 vols, London: Smith, Elder & Co., 1850).
Autobiography, Earliest Sketches	*Leigh Hunt's Autobiography: The Earliest Sketches,* ed. Stephen F.Fogle, University of Florida Monographs: Humanities,2 (Gainesville, Florida: University of Florida Press, 1959).
BLJ	*Byron's Letters and Journals,* ed. Leslie A.Marchand (13 vols, London: John Murray, 1973–94).
Blunden	Edmund Blunden, *Leigh Hunt. A Biography* (London: Cobden and Sanderson, 1930).
BM	*Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine.*
BPW	George Gordon, Lord Byron, *The Complete Poetical Works,* ed. Jerome J.McGann (7 vols, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980–93).
CC	*The Collected Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge,* Bollingen Series LXXV (Princeton and London: Princeton University Press and Routledge, 1969–2002).
CL	*The Collected Letters of Samuel Taylor Coleridge,* ed. E.L.Griggs (6 vols, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1956–71).
CLH	*The Correspondence of Leigh Hunt, Edited by his Eldest Son* (2 vols, London: Smith, Elder & Co., 1862).
Cox	Jeffrey N.Cox, *Poetry and Politics in the Cockney School: Keats, Shelley, Hunt and their Circle* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).
CPW	*The Complete Poetical Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge,* ed. E.H.Coleridge (2 vols, London, 1912).
Critical Essays	*Critical Essays on the Performers of the London Theatres* (London: John Hunt, 1807).
E	*Examiner.*
Edgecombe	Rodney Stenning Edgecombe, *Leigh Hunt and the Poetry of Fancy* (London and Toronto: Associated University Presses, 1994).

Feast	Leigh Hunt, *The Feast of the Poets* (London: James Cawthorn, 1814).
Feast (1815)	Leigh Hunt, *The Feast of the Poets* (2nd edn, London: Gale & Fenner, 1815).
Foliage	Leigh Hunt, *Foliage; or, Poems Original and Translated* (London: C.& J.Ollier, 1818).
Gates	*Leigh Hunt: A Life in Letters. Together with some Correspondence of William Hazlitt,* ed. Eleanor M.Gates (Essex, Conn.: Falls River Publications, 1998).
Howe	*The Complete Works of William Hazlitt,* ed. P.P.Howe (21 vols, London and Toronto: J.M.Dent & Sons Ltd 1930–4).
Indicator	Leigh Hunt, *The Indicator* (London: Joseph Appleyard, 1820).
JKCD	Nicholas Roe, *John Keats and the Culture of Dissent* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997).
Juvenilia	Leigh *Hunt, Juvenilia; or, a Collection of Poems* (3rd edn London: J.Whiting 1801).
KC	*The Keats Circle: Letters and Papers 1816–1878 and More Letters and Papers 1814–1879,* ed. Hyder E.Rollins (2nd edn, 2 vols, Cambridge, Mass., 1965).
K&H	*Keats and History,* ed. Nicholas Roe (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995).
Kucich	Gregory P.Kucich,' "The Wit in the Dungeon": Leigh Hunt and the Insolent Politics of Cockney Coteries', *Romanticism on the Net,* 14 (May 1999).
LJK	*The Letters of John Keats, 1814–21,* ed. Hyder E.Rollins (2 vols, Cambridge, Mass., 1958).
K-SJ	*Keats-Shelley Journal.*
K-SMB	*Keats-Shelley Memorial Bulletin.*
K-SR	*Keats-Shelley Review.*
Landré	Louis Landré, *Leigh Hunt (1784–1859). Contribution à l'histoire du Romantisme Anglais* (2 vols, Paris: Société D'Edition 'Les Belles Lettres', 1936).
MWB	Leigh Hunt, *Men, Women, and Books; A Selection of Sketches, Essays and Critical Memoirs, from his Uncollected Prose Writings* (2 vols, London: Smith, Elder & Co., 1847).
OED	*Oxford English Dictionary.*
PJK	*Poems of John Keats,* ed. Jack Stillinger (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1978).
PWLH	*The Poetical Works of Leigh Hunt,* ed. H.S.Milford (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1923).
PWLH (1832)	*The Poetical Works of Leigh Hunt* (London: Edward Moxon, 1832).
Rimini	Leigh Hunt, *The Story of Rimini: A Poem* (London: John Murray, 1816).

RR	*The Romantics Reviewed: Contemporary Reviews of British Romantic Writers,* ed. Donald H.Reiman (9 vols, New York and London: Garland Publishing, 1972).
SiR	*Studies in Romanticism.*
SL	*The Letters of Percy Bysshe Shelley,* ed. F.L.Jones (2 vols, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1964).
SPP	*Percy Bysshe Shelley: Poetry and Prose,* ed. D.H.Reiman and S.B.Powers (New York: Norton, 1977).
WPBS	*The Works of Percy Bysshe Shelley,* ed. R.Ingpen and W.E.Peck (10 vols, London, 1926–30; 1965).
WPW	*William Wordsworth,* ed. Stephen Gill, Oxford Authors Series (Oxford University Press: Oxford and New York, 1984).

NOTE ON TEXTS

Unless noted otherwise, quotations from Hunt's poetry will be from *PWLH.* Quotations from Shakespeare will be from *The Complete Works of Shakespeare,* ed. P.Alexander (1951; London and Glasgow: Collins, 1975).



'Leigh Hunt. Editor of the Examiner'. This portrait by John Jackson shows Hunt aged 25; it illustrated the autobiographical 'Memoir of Mr. James Henry Leigh Hunt' in the *Monthly Mirror* (April 1810). From the copy of the *Monthly Mirror* in the Brewer-Leigh Hunt Collection, the University of Iowa Libraries, Iowa City, Iowa.

1 Introduction

Leigh Hunt's track of radiance

Nicholas Roe

When asked 'which poets influenced [him] most as a young man', the Poet Laureate John Betjeman replied: 'William Blake first. Nursery rhymes, then William Blake, then Keats, Leigh Hunt, and most of all Tennyson'.[1] The hesitation, 'William Blake first. Nursery rhymes, *then* William Blake', tracks back to formative encounters with lyric and suggests how children's songs led on to *Songs of Innocence and Experience.* Scenes from Betjeman's childhood around Hampstead Heath and Highgate summoned local presences: 'Then Millfield Lane looked like a Constable/And all the grassy hillocks spoke of Keats'.[2] Tennyson was the voice of another English landscape, 'poet of Lincs', inspiring 'master technician' of verse.[3]

And Betjeman's other early influence, Leigh Hunt? When compared with Blake, who in 2001 was the subject of an awe-inspiring exhibition at the Tate Gallery, Hunt has almost disappeared. Yet in the first decades of the nineteenth century, when both were active in London, Hunt was the more visible of the two. As editor of the *Examiner* newspaper he led the campaign for parliamentary reform and civil rights for Irish Catholics. He was the author of *The Story of Rimini,* a poem combining lyrical genius, narrative flair and a liberal morality. As a critic Hunt helped launch the careers of Keats, Shelley, Tennyson and D.G.Rossetti. Following the devastating reviews of Wordsworth's *Poems, in Two Volumes* (1807), Hunt broke with the prevailing view of Wordsworth to become one of his most discerning critics–setting out arguments about Wordsworth's poetry subsequently taken up by better-known commentators like Coleridge and Hazlitt. Unlike those contemporaries, Hunt had also written perceptively about many women poets of the early nineteenth century. Wherever one looks in the nineteenth-century literary scene in England, Leigh Hunt's influence is apparent. *Leigh Hunt: Life, Poetics, Politics* is the first full-length collection of scholarly and critical essays devoted to him.

Shortly after Hunt left Christ's Hospital, November 1799, publication of his poems in *Juvenilia* (1801) brought him a kind of fame; as Hunt later said, the book 'was unfortunately successful everywhere' (*Autobiography,* I: p. 193). He was 'shown about at parties' and fêted as a prodigy, although Hunt

later dismissed these poems as a 'trash' of imitations from Collins, Gray, Pope, Akenside, Thomson and Spenser (*Autobiography,* I: p. 186). He was scathing about his first, youthful collection: when compared with Wordsworth's and Coleridge's 'new' poetry of mind and nature, his own attempts appeared derivative and lacking in 'real spirit' (see *Foliage,* pp. 10–11). Yet what impresses about the book now is the success with which–as a 16-year-old–he had imitated and adapted his favourite poets, including Coleridge's recently published 'Frost at Midnight'. Hunt's disdain for *Juvenilia* probably had more to do with the extraordinary list of over 800 subscribers. Publishers and politicians, clergymen and lawyers, painters, poets, bankers and diplomats were listed over fifteen pages at the front of the volume, giving it a 'glittering illusion of fame and substance'.[4] The impression was that Hunt had launched a successful literary career although, as he came to see, the book actually represented a tentative first step. More damagingly, the subscription list (updated and expanded in each edition) signalled the dependence upon patronage that had blighted earlier generations of the Hunt family.[5] From now on Hunt determined not to be burdened with obligations, a decision which influenced his independent stance as a theatre reviewer for his brother John's paper the *News* (1805–8) and as the editor of the *Examiner* (1808–22).

In his theatre reviews for the *News* Hunt abandoned the convention of 'puffing' productions and offered, instead, a combative critical engagement with the plays and performers. What he found on the London stage were 'wretched dramas which are called new without the least pretension of originality', and actors whose 'histrionic genius' exaggerated the 'surfaces and externals' of character (*Critical Essays,* pp. x, xi, xiii).The leading actor John Philip Kemble succeeded best in roles like Macbeth, which suited his imperious stage presence. But Kemble's 'studious and important preciseness' could seem calculated: 'he never pulls out his handkerchief, Hunt noticed, 'without a design on the audience' (*Critical Essays,* pp. 8, 10). Kemble mimicked 'external habits' rather than inner 'mental character'; by contrast Hunt found Kemble's sister, Sarah Siddons, 'always natural, because on occasions of great feeling…the passions should influence the actions' (*Critical Essays,* pp. 2, 16). Hunt looked for a correspondence between gesture or 'external action' and what he called 'the action of the mind'; accordingly, he found Hamlet's many 'combinations of passion' to be 'the most difficult in the English drama' (*Critical Essays,* pp. 25, 40–1). A few years later Hunt admired Edmund Kean's mastery of gesture and countenance, through which he united 'common life [and] tragedy' (*E,* 26 February 1815, and see p. 222).

Hunt's reviews were published as *Critical Essays on the Performers of the London Theatres* (1807–8), establishing his critical reputation and opening a path on which others were to follow. The book brought him fresh acclaim, and, although largely ignored by modern critics, it helped show the way for the Shakespearean criticism of Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Charles Lamb and

William Hazlitt, all of whom were concerned with 'action of the mind' or, as Byron termed it, 'mental theatre'.[6]

From 1808, when he founded the *Examiner* with his brother John, Hunt was the most prominent liberal journalist in Britain. In 1811 the *Examiner* was prosecuted for reprinting an article deploring military flogging (for the article see *E,* 2 September 1810, pp. 557–8); acquittal brought Hunt a letter of 'sincerest congratulations' from an Oxford undergraduate, Percy Shelley.[7] Then, in 1813, another government prosecution led to heavy fines and gaol sentences for Hunt's portrayal of the Prince of Wales as

> a violator of his word, a libertine over head and ears in debt and disgrace, a despiser of domestic ties, the companion of gamblers and demireps, a man who has just closed half a century without one single claim on the gratitude of his country or the respect of posterity![8]

It was a truth universally acknowledged, but publishing it in the *Examiner* cost the Hunt brothers £500 each (an enormous sum at the time) and put them in prison for two years. In Surrey Gaol at Horsemonger Lane Leigh Hunt welcomed celebrity visitors to his cell, which he decorated to resemble a Spenserian bower. Jeremy Bentham and Maria Edgeworth called, as did Thomas Moore and Lord Byron, who nominated Hunt 'the wit in the dungeon'.[9] Charles Cowden Clarke brought 'a weekly basket of fresh flowers, fruit, and vegetables' from the garden at Enfield School (for Clarke's recollection of Hunt in prison, see p. 218). The reality of Hunt's 'unwholesome' and unhealthy surroundings in prison was recalled by another of his visitors, Cyrus Redding (see p. 226).

Hunt was depicted in cartoons as 'A Free Born Englishman', bound with irons and forcibly silenced (see Figure 1), a martyr for liberty whose release from prison in February 1815 drew an admiring sonnet from John Keats. For Keats, a steady reader of the *Examiner* since his schooldays, Hunt was a political hero 'showing truth' and an example of startling poetic originality in 'regions of his own'. Although Keats did not meet Hunt until October 1816, by identifying poetry as the spirited song of a free man he accurately sketched the imaginative resources with which Hunt confronted political oppression. His Spenserian bower was a scene of imaginative resistance, a cell of poetic idealism inside the walls of tyranny. Here Hunt revised *The Feast of the Poets,* his satirical survey of poets past and present; set about completing his poem *The Story of Rimini;* and continued editing the *Examiner* which appeared continuously during his imprisonment. As Hunt became aware, however, the claims of poetics and politics could prove mutually exclusive and this was a tension–outlined in his poem 'Politics and Poetics'–that he would seek to resolve in subsequent years, notably in his complex volume *Foliage* (1818).[10]

One addition to *The Feast of the Poets* was a long note about Wordsworth, evaluating his distinction as a poet and explaining why, in Hunt's view, he

Figure 1 'A Free Born Englishman! The Pride of the World!'. George Cruikshank's cartoon is dated 19 April 1813, shortly after Leigh Hunt was sent to Horsemonger Lane Gaol. The image represents the oppression of the whole country, but Cruikshank may well have Hunt particularly in mind. By courtesy of St Andrews University Library.

had at times fallen short of the aims announced in the Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*. Hunt's *Critical Essays on the Performers of the London Theatres* had shown how to reinvigorate the contemporary stage; now his criticism of Wordsworth was forming the taste for a new age of poetry–praising 'instances [where Wordsworth] has set the example' (*Feast,* p. 93), but also stating perspicuously the 'defects of a great poet' (*Feast,* p. 95). Having noted the exemplary poems that set Wordsworth alongside Spenser and Milton, Hunt identified in Wordsworth a tendency to 'morbidity' in treating madness and heightened emotions, and an 'over-contemplative' abstraction which 'turns our thoughts away from society and men altogether' (*Feast,* pp. 93–7, 107). Rather than redirecting 'our thirst for extraordinary intelligence to more genial sources of interest', Wordsworth 'substitute[s] one set of diseased perceptions for another'; instead of 'interesting us in the individuals of our species', Wordsworth foregrounds himself and 'makes a business out

of reverie' (*Feast,* pp. 93, 96, 97). Self-preoccupation informed Wordsworth's 'dangerous art' of 'giving importance to actions and situations by our feelings, instead of adapting our feelings to the importance they possess'. This led, Hunt argued, to confusion and perplexity (*Feast,* pp. 98, 99).

In August and October 1814 William Hazlitt took up Hunt's remarks in his long review of Wordsworth's *Excursion,* developing what Hunt had said about Wordsworth's 'over-contemplative' poetry in describing the 'intense intellectual egotism' of his long poem (*E,* 21 August 1814, p. 542). When Keats mentioned the 'wordsworthian or egotistical sublime' in his letter to Richard Woodhouse, 27 October 1818 (*LJK,* I: p. 387), he was thinking of Hazlitt's *Excursion* review, republished in *The Round Table* (1817). Hazlitt's influence on Keats is well-known although, in this instance, the idea of Wordsworth's poetic egotism came to Keats via Hazlitt from Hunt. Hazlitt finds grandeur in Wordsworth's 'dangerous art' of adding 'a weight of interest from the resources of his own mind, which makes the most insignificant thing serious', but he follows Hunt in 'taking leave of [Wordsworth] when he makes pedlars and ploughmen his heroes' (*E,* 2 October 1814, p. 636). Chapter 22 of Coleridge's *Biographia Literaria* (1817) takes one of its themes from Hunt in elucidating the *'characteristic defects of Wordsworth's poetry'.* Among the 'defects' listed by Coleridge are several that Hunt had already identified and explained: Hunt wrote of the 'morbid' subjects of Wordsworth's poems, and Coleridge of the 'wilful selections from human nature…under the least attractive associations'; Hunt noted in Wordsworth an excess of 'abstraction', Coleridge an 'occasional prolixity, repetition, and an eddying instead of progression of thought'; Hunt's idea of a 'dangerous art' is explained by Coleridge as 'an intensity of feeling disproportionate to *such* knowledge and value of the objects described… a disproportion of the expressions to the thoughts…[and] a disproportion of thought to the circumstance and the occasion'.[11] Hazlitt's and Coleridge's criticisms have long been recognised as among the earliest as well as the most intelligent and perceptive Wordsworth received.[12]In his essay on Wordsworth in *The Feast of the Poets,* Hunt took the lead in identifying the beauties and explaining the defects of Wordsworth's poetry, thereby initiating the critical reassessment which would establish Wordsworth's reputation for the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

While in prison Hunt also worked on his poem *The Story of Rimini,* and, following his release, it was published in 1816 by John Murray. Readers divided sharply over the poem's merits. It was praised by the *Eclectic Review* for an 'easy graceful style of familiar narrative'; *The Edinburgh Review* commended a 'gem of great grace and spirit, and, in many passages and many particulars, of infinite beauty and delicacy'.[13] The poem proved popular: it was read widely, and quickly became the focus of controversy with the 'Cockney School' essays in *Blackwood's Magazine* attributed to 'Z' (John Lockhart and Christopher North). The essays vilified Hunt as vulgar, ill-educated, and, in *The Story of Rimini,* 'the secret and invidious foe of

virtue'.[14] For Z it was the manner of the poem, as much as its content, which caused offence.

At the centre of *The Story of Rimini* is the adulterous (and incestuous) relationship of Paulo and Francesca, two lovers rescued by Hunt from Canto 5 of Dante's *Inferno* and placed in a modern narrative which valued their 'fatal passion' over social 'forms' and 'authorized selfishness'.[15] The poem begins with the colourful pageant in which Paulo arrives at Ravenna to wed Francesca as a proxy for his brother, Giovanni. While Francesca gives her 'hope, belief, love, passion' to Paulo, the 'elaborate snare' of the marriage binds her to ill-tempered Giovanni, and the tragedy which ensues is explored with sympathetic insight. The climax is Paulo and Francesca's lovemaking, and this part of Hunt's narrative draws on his theatrical criticism in tracing passionate 'action of mind':

> There's apt to be, at conscious times like these,
> An affectation of a bright-eyed ease,
> An air of something quite serene and sure,
> As if to seem so, was to be, secure:
> With this the lovers met, with this they spoke…[16]

The immediacy of Hunt's poetry, its affability, its impulsiveness, overlays complex effects. 'There's apt to be', for example, chattily hovering between 'likely to be' and the more knowing 'all too likely to be', insinuates the natural tendency of Paulo's and Francesca's 'bright-eyed ease'. The lovers, meanwhile, concentrate on the appearance of calm, 'As if to seem so, was to be, secure'. *The Story of Rimini* is an artful poem about artful behaviour, as Z noted when he measured Hunt's shockingly 'indelicate' performance against Wordsworth's 'purity of thought' and 'patriarchal simplicity of feeling' in *The Excursion.*[17] Ironically, however, *The Story of Rimini* had been written in a 'free and idiomatic…language' of 'real life' which drew upon and extended Wordsworth's experiments in *Lyrical Ballads.*[18] Where Wordsworth sought to purge the 'gaudiness and inane phraseology of modern writers', Hunt's poetry adopted a 'spoken jargon' and explored 'human passions, human characters, and human incidents', not in the solitary ('morbid') figures favoured by Wordsworth, but among sociable scenes of suburban, domestic, bourgeois life.[19] The suburban scene in Hunt's poem may represent an area of equilibrium between the city and the open countryside, as Stuart Curran contended in his account of Hunt and Wordsworth.[20] Equally, as Elizabeth Jones's chapter points out, the suburbs are dangerous terrain, long associated with license, disease, and insurrection. Here distinct groups–social, ethnic, national–mingle, and their language is appropriately fluid and changeful. Hunt's genius was to create a poetry of and for this milieu–smart, modern, full of linguistic innovations and written, as Michael O'Neill shows us. as if to the moment. In *The Story of Rimini* Hunt's slippery idiomatic language evokes a world of

spellbinding surface, in which 'to seem so, was to be'. Rather than recommending suburban 'pretence, affectation, finery, and gaudiness', which was how Z read the poem, *The Story of Rimini* challenges readers to see through superficial 'forms' to a clearer appreciation of 'justice' and 'natural impulses'.[21] Among the poem's later admirers was Elizabeth Barrett, who defended Hunt against his detractors: 'it never was proved either to my reason or my feelings that *Rimini* had an immoral tendency. Indeed my belief is exactly the reverse' (see her letter to Mary Russell Mitford, p. 215).

Associated with Hunt in the Cockney School were William Hazlitt, who contributed frequently to the *Examiner,* and John Keats and Percy Shelley, introduced and championed by Hunt as poets who 'go directly to Nature for inspiration'.[22] These friendships indicate how, from 1815, Hunt's political campaigning in the *Examiner* was interwoven with his literary career. His most successful journal, *The Indicator* (1819–21), was a literary supplement for the *Examiner,* although political interests were not entirely excluded. The subject of the first *Indicator* article was Thomas Paine, and when Hunt wrote his long review of Keats's 1820 collection he showed how the poems displayed 'the modern philosophy of sympathy and natural justice' and 'a high feeling of humanity'.[23] Keats, in Hunt's estimation, was the modern poet of the Rights of Man.

Following 'The Indicator's Farewell', which concluded the journal on 21 March 1821, Shelley wrote to Hunt from Pisa reporting Byron's proposal 'that you should come and go shares with him and me, in a periodical work *[The Liberal]* to be conducted here' (*SL,* II: p. 344). The circulation of the *Examiner* was 'lamentably falling off' (*CLH,* I: p. 163), and Hunt had been in poor health. He resigned his editorship and, with his family, set sail for Italy on 15 November 1821. Delayed by storms, they wintered near Plymouth and, having resumed their voyage in the spring, arrived at Genoa on 15 June 1822.

Shelley welcomed them rapturously[24] but just one week later he was drowned. For Hunt the loss of Shelley was overwhelming, 'as hard a blow from fortune as could well be given', and it set the later course of his life and writing (Gates, p. 164). With Byron, Hunt attended Shelley's cremation on the beach at Viareggio on 16 August, and, in the years following, sought to assuage his grief by 'dematerializing' his friend and creating the '*religion*…towards Mr. Shelley's memory' in *Christianism* and *The Religion of the Heart.*[25] In September 1822 the Hunts, Byron and Mary Shelley left Pisa for Albaro, near Genoa, where the Hunts lived with Mary Shelley. Just four numbers of *The Liberal* were published, 1822–3, containing numerous contributions by Hunt including his 'Letters from Abroad', Byron's *The Vision of Judgment* and Hazlitt's *My First Acquaintance with Poets.* But friendship in this circle quickly grew strained, and financial difficulties broke it up; in September 1823 the Hunts moved across country to Florence where they lived 'in a primitive manner' (*CLH,* I: p. 225;). Money

was tight and Hunt, regretting that he had surrendered his interest in the *Examiner,* quarrelled with John about ownership of the paper and payment for articles he had written for the *Literary Examiner.*[26] Keats's friend Charles Armitage Brown, who was living in Florence, tried valiantly to disentangle their differences.[27] While at Florence Hunt wrote his satire on William Gifford, *Ultra-Crepidarius,* drafting it in the same notebook he had used for a journal of their voyage to Italy, and resumed contributions to the *Examiner* with his 'Wishing-Cap' essays (on which he later drew for his *Autobiography*). He met Walter Savage Landor and in 1824 was visited by William Hazlitt.

Towards the end of that year, Mary Novello wrote to caution 'against expecting London on your return to be what it was'.[28] The Hunts passed six months of 1825 in Florence, then travelled through France, took a steamer across the English channel and, by early December, they were once again settled in London. As Mary Novello indicated, the city was transformed by the new industrial age, with 'clouds of dust' from macadamised roads and 'endless projections' so that 'everything is to be improved, but no time for enjoying those improvements'.[29] From the notorious circle associated with Hazlitt and Keats, the Shelleys and Byron, Hunt survived into the Victorian age as a poet of 'kindly enjoyments' (*Foliage,* p. 16) who now seemed at odds with the thrusting commercial and imperial spirit of the times.

In the following years he edited numerous journals including *The Companion* (1828), *The Tatler* (1830–2), and *Leigh Hunt's London Journal* (1834–5), and contributed articles to others including *Court Magazine* (1832–3), *Tait's Edinburgh Magazine* (January–September 1833), *The True Sun* (1833–4) and the *Monthly Chronicle* (1838–40).[30] His collected *Poetical Works* appeared in 1832, and then, in 1835, rumours of war sparked his remarkable protest ballad *Captain Sword and Captain Pen*–a poem which Edmund Blunden noted was viscerally alert to 'what *can* happen to flesh and blood in war' and also sensitive to 'the secondary havoc of war' in the 'maimed and blood-saddened men…still suffering in hospitals and private houses; and how much offspring, in all probability, is rendered sickly and melancholy' (Blunden, p. 266, quoting Hunt's note, *PWLH,* p. 704). The poem circles between scenes of 'military gaiety' (*Autobiography,* III: p. 237) and battlefield horrors ('Now see what crawleth, well as it may,/ Out of the ditch, and looketh that way,/What horror all black, in the sick moonlight,/ Kneeling', 301–3, *PWLH,* p. 87), and it concludes with 'the bullet-sense' of war-mongers succeeded by the peaceful 'line of Captain Pen'–that is, the company of sages, patriots, and poets: ''Twas only for many-souled Captain Pen/To make a world of swordless men' (554–5, *PWLH,* p. 93). Emulating Southey's anti-war poems of the 1790s and Byron's siege of Ismael Cantos in *Don Juan* (VII and VIII), in *Captain Sword and Captain Pen* Hunt writes graphically about war to 'show what has been hitherto kept concealed'; his notes for the poem should be read by anyone who believes contemporary military propaganda about 'smart weapons' and 'surgical strikes'. *Captain*

Sword and Captain Pen is one of the great protest poems in English, with Shelley's *The Masque of Anarchy,* Wilfred Owen's and Edmund Blunden's poems of the Great War, and, coming up to the present, James Fenton's 'Out of the East'.

A notable success of Hunt's middle years was his play *A Legend of Florence* (February 1840), which brought him literary and social respectability (it was performed for Queen Victoria). With the support of Carlyle and Macaulay, he obtained a modest pension from the government, ensuring some financial security. A few years later his critical essays in *Imagination and Fancy* (1844) combined Romantic poetic theory with close readings of poems from Spenser to Keats (for Hunt's admiration for Coleridge, 'a perfectionist in poetry, whose thought and rhythm were one', see p. 227). Hunt's commentary on *The Eve of St. Agnes* brought out the poem's psychological acuity, consolidating Keats's reputation for nineteenth-century readers and opening the way for Richard Monckton Milnes's biography of the poet (1848).

Hunt's *Autobiography,* published in 1850, drew on material from an early 'Memoir' in the *Monthly Mirror* (April 1810) and on *Lord Byron and Some of His Contemporaries* (1828). Now 'free from anger' (*Autobiography,* III: p. 3), Hunt had moderated his earlier comments about Byron. Reviews of the *Autobiography* were on balance favourable: *Tait's Edinburgh Magazine* welcomed 'a sketch of literary history for the last fifty years' and, finding in Hunt a 'link between us and men two generations ago', suggested the elusive temper of the life and the book:

> He belongs essentially to that period of society which is...characterised by the term transitional. Loosened from the moorings of the departing, and not yet linked to the coming system of thought, he floats at large between them with a sort of easy scepticism.[31]

This seems right. Hunt was a lifelong admirer of Collins and Gray, whose poetry of sensibility he had imitated in *Juvenilia,* and he lived long enough to contemplate a modernist poem on 'the wonders of steam and electricity' (*PWLH,* p. 700).

Thomas Carlyle, a close friend, praised Hunt's *Autobiography* as an 'excellently good Book' that 'will be welcome to other generations as well as to ours' (see p. 217). A second edition was called for. Hunt prepared this for the press (December 1859; the title page is dated 1860) and by 1906 there had been ten printings of it.[32] More often recalled from this time, however, is Charles Dickens's caricature in *Bleak House* (1853). Harold Skimpole, 'an absolute reproduction of a real man', represented Hunt's 'elate' spirit as breezily irresponsible–'so free from effort and spontaneous…a romantic youth who had undergone some unique process of depreciation'.[33] In some respects Hunt's attitude to publishing represented the easy-going arrangements of earlier times, and he happily confessed to a 'habit of inattention to money

matters' which, over the years, led to some nasty scrapes.[34] His 1832 *Poetical Works* was supported by a subscription announced in the *New Monthly Magazine* for March 1832, which brought together 'men of opposite politics' on 'this common ground of literary fellowship'. Impressive names were recruited, including Coleridge, Wordsworth, Southey, D'lsraeli, the Lords Holland, Dover and Mulgrave, Francis Jeffrey, Thomas Campbell and 'the venerable Godwin'.[35] On publication of the book, however, a slip of paper inserted between the preliminary pages informed readers that the subscription list was 'withheld at present, that it may be published in a more perfect state in… JANUARY [1833]'.[36] By October 1832 the list had led to a 'very awkward misconstruction' between Hunt and his publisher, with the suspicion of some kind of 'double dealing' on Hunt's part.[37] By living from the eighteenth to the mid-nineteenth century Hunt witnessed the emergence of authorship as a commercially driven profession. In this new environment he appeared to embody an unbusinesslike 'artistic bohemianism'–culpably so, in Dickens's eyes.[38] In creating Harold Skimpole, however, Dickens chose to overlook Hunt's astute sense of the literary marketplace and the extent to which he had sought to exploit its opportunities. The *Literary Pocket-Book,* first published in December 1818, for example, was aimed at Christmas sales and the emerging fashion for souvenir or 'keepsake' volumes. His anthology *Readings for Railways* (1849) catered for a new readership among the Victorian travelling public.

Dickens's depreciation of Hunt proved influential, and Elizabeth Barrett rightly believed that 'he has been wronged by many' (see p. 215). Ian Jack's survey of Hunt, for example, contains some paradoxical claims reflecting nineteenth-century prejudices. In that Hunt edited the *Examiner* for some fourteen years and was 'courageous in facing political opposition', he was certainly 'not a political animal' (Jack's words): the 'Prospectus' to the *Examiner* had defiantly proclaimed the paper's 'IMPARTIALITY' in 'POLITICS'.[39] Jack's observation, however, is meant to diminish, and his account of Hunt's literary life betrays a similar bias. He points out, correctly, that if judged by the number of times he is right about his contemporaries… Hunt has no rival in the history of English criticism' (an observation echoed in this book by Michael O'Neill). Yet, having acknowledged Hunt's critical acumen, Jack unaccountably dismisses him as a 'dilettante, a connoisseur, with something of the superficiality that the term implies'.[40] It is this mistaken, Skimpolish idea of Hunt which has led to him being described as a 'charming and vivacious but very improvident' poet, who 'affected Keats for the worse'.[41] One of the purposes of the present volume is to redress such underestimates of Hunt.

To further that purpose, the book includes a chapter of 'Interviews and Recollections' relating to Hunt. As those accounts demonstrate, following Hunt's death on 28 August 1859, he was never overlooked or forgotten, although overshadowed by Byron, Shelley and Keats. He continued to appeal to Alfred Tennyson and D.G.Rossetti, whose careers he had fostered,

as well as to admirers like William Allingham, Elizabeth Barrett, Charlotte Brontë, Thomas Carlyle, Thomas Macaulay, A.C.Swinburne and Virginia Woolf.[42] By the 1920s, when John Betjeman published his first poems, Hunt was re-emerging as a writer in tune with the times albeit one who (like William Blake) was not included in the canon of English Romantic poets which he had helped to establish.

In the years following the First World War, English poetry was characterised by the modernism of Pound and Eliot, and by the Romantic lyricism of two poets who served on the Western Front: Edward Thomas (killed in 1918) and Edmund Blunden (who survived). The post-war era was a period when Leigh Hunt had renewed appeal–when his hard-won philosophy of 'cheerfulness', set against the unsparing realism of *Captain Sword and Captain Pen,* once again communicated his belief that '[w]e should consider ourselves as…creatures made to enjoy more than to know, to know infinitely nevertheless in proportion as we enjoy kindly, and finally, to put our own shoulders to the wheel and get out of the mud upon the green sward again'.[43]

In 1923 Humphrey Milford published the first full edition of Hunt's *Poetical Works,* followed seven years later by Edmund Blunden's *Leigh Hunt: A Biography* and *Leigh Hunt's 'Examiner' Examined, 1808–1825.* Blunden observed that ' [a] careful life of Leigh Hunt should have been written many years ago, when some who had known him were alive, and when the documents were still mainly assembled'.[44] When Blunden was researching, Hunt's contemporaries were long dead, and his papers and books dispersed around the globe.[45] Blunden nevertheless incorporated material then 'new to print' and his narrative, which shares the sympathetic qualities of Hunt's own prose, avoided 'bristling references' and footnotes (Blunden, p. xiii). It was followed in 1936 by a scholarly porcupine, the remarkable two-volume study by Louis Landré: *Leigh Hunt (1784–1859): Contribution à l'histoire du Romantisme Anglais.* 'Leigh Hunt est une de ces figures un peu indistinctes de l'histoire littéraire', Landré begins (evoking Hunt's appeal for Betjeman); over some 900 pages, his book documents Hunt's life and writings in exhaustive detail.

Landré drew from British and American archives, and acknowledged the assistance of Luther Brewer whose books *My Leigh Hunt Library: The First Editions* (1932) and *The Holograph Letters* (1938) describe his collection of Huntiana now at the University of Iowa Library. Landré also built on the researches of George Stout, who in 1928 had completed a Harvard doctoral thesis, 'Studies towards a Biography of Leigh Hunt'. And he mentions the interest of Edmund Blunden–'le délicat poète anglais'.[46] Landré's book has not been translated into English, and is available only in the original paper-bound edition of 1936.

The second half of the twentieth century saw editions of Hunt's political essays and dramatic criticism by Lawrence Huston Houtchens and Carolyn Washburn Houtchens. Donald Reiman's *The Romantics Reviewed* reprinted in