

MINOR PIECES.

TO A SPIDER RUNNING ACROSS A ROOM.*¹

THOU poisonous rascal, running at this rate
O'er the perplexing desart of a mat,
Scrambling and scuttling on thy scratchy legs,
Like a scared miser with his money-bags;
Thou thief—thou scamp—thou hideous much in little,
Bearing away the plunder of a spital,—
Caitiff of corners,—doer of dark deeds,
Mere lump of poison lifted on starv'd threads,
That while they run, go shuddering here and there,
As if abhorring what they're forc'd to bear,
Like an old bloated tyrant, whom his slaves
Bear from the gaping of a thousand graves,
And take to some vile corner of a court,
Where felons of his filthy race resort,—
I have thee now;—I have thee here, full blown,
Thou lost old wretch, benighted by the noon!
What dost thou say? What dost thou think? Dost see
Providence hanging o'er thee, to wit, me?
Dost fear? Dost shrink with all thine eyes to view
The shadowing threat of mine avenging shoe?
Now, now it comes;—one pang,—and thou wilt lie
Flat as the sole that treads thy gorg'd impurity.

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* Author: Leigh Hunt / Transcribed and annotated by Giacomo Ferrari.

Yet hold:—why should I do it? Why should I,
Who in my infidel fidelity,
Believer in the love, though not the wrath,
Have spared so many crawlers o'er my path,—
Why should I trample here, and like a beast,
Settle this humblest of them all and least?
The vagrant never injured me or mine,
Wrote no critiques, stabb'd at no heart divine,
And as to flies, Collyer himself must dine.² }
Flies may be kill'd as speedily as mutton,
And your black spider's not your blackest glutton.
The vermin's a frank vermin, after all;
Makes no pretence to a benignant call;
Does not hold up a hideous white hand,
To tickle grandams to his promised land;
Nor pulls white handkerchiefs from out his blackness,
To wipe the tears,—that give a surfeit slackness.
He's not the Laureat, not my turn'd old Bob;³
Not Bull the brute,⁴ nor Gazetteer the grub.⁵
He does not “profess Poetry,” like Mill;⁶
Music, like Buzby;⁷ nor, what's higher still,
“Moral Philosophy,” like wicked Will.⁸
He swells, I grant, and 'tis with poison too;
But not, toad-eating Muddyford,⁹ like you:
He plunders, and runs off; but not like Theod.,
To make amends by slandering for King Ehud;¹⁰
He skulks; but 'tis not as “dear Ally” does,
To pry and pounce on females, and keep close }
At fingers only that can pull a nose.¹¹
Honest the rogue is, in his way,—hey, Groly?¹²—
And does not call his snares and slaughters “Holy;”
Nor like the Russian that insulted Spain,
Cry “Manners,” and affect the gentleman.

He holds to what he is, like her that bore him,
A spider, as his father was before him.
'Twas Cowl,¹³ not he, that by old Gizzard's fire,¹⁴
Born of a man, turn'd reptile and mere liar,
And chang'd his shape with his own fright, as mothers,
Their tender burthen incomplete, change others.
And have I spared the very worst of these¹⁵
A thousand times, and all for their own ease,—
Let them crawl on, and wink'd at Gizzard's self,
To tread out thee, poor emblematic elf?
Thee, whose worst vice is, that thy hang-dog looks¹⁶
Remind us of his face, not of his books,
For all the poison, clubb'd from all thy race,
Could not do that: you're safe from that disgrace.
Have I, these five years, spared the dog a stick,¹⁷
Cut for his special use, and reasonably thick,
Now, because prose had fell'd him just before,¹⁸
Then, to oblige the very heart he tore;
Then, from conniving to suppose him human,
Two-legg'd, and one that had a serving-woman;¹⁹
Then, because some one saw him in a shiver,
Which shewed, if not a heart, he had a liver;
And then, because they said the dog was dying,
His very symptoms being given to lying?
Have I done this? Have I endur'd e'en Murrain,²⁰
Whom even his own face finds past enduring,
Trying to slip aside from him, and cut him,
When honest men ask questions that don't suit him?
Have I let strut, behind their dunghill screens,
All the brisk crowers in Scotch magazines,²¹
Who take for day their crackling Northern Lights,²²
And scream, and scratch, and keep it up o' nights,
Braggarts with beaten plumes, and sensual hypocrites?
Him too who feeds them,²³ and in whom there run }
}

All Curril's²⁴ and Osborne's²⁵ melted brass in one,
 (Blackguard,²⁶ thought wrong by the young trade, but wronger
 By those whose consciences have eaten longer)
 Have I spared him, when, with a true rogue's awe
 Not of the truth or justice, but the law,
 He lay before my feet, and proffer'd me
 His rascal money for indemnity?²⁷
 In scorn I let him go, just taught, it seems,
 How to call people more ingenious names;
 For which, I own, I merit the reproofs
 Of all the world, but those who read his huffs.²⁸

Go, you poor wretch,—I mean the spider; go,
 And take care how you bite Sir Hudson Lowe.²⁹

SOUTHEOGONY,

OR THE BIRTH OF THE POET LAUREAT.

Incipe, parve puer, risu cognoscere matrem.—VIRG.

Laugh, if you can; but one way or another,
 Do pray, old boy, begin to know your mother.

WE'VE all of us read, in some poet or other,
 That Pallas was born without ever a mother;
 And 'tis equally certain, or more certain rather,
 That Mars was produc'd without ever a father:
 For as to old Jupiter's pain in his brows,
 The reason for that might still lie with his spouse;
 And as to his getting the thing in his head,
 It's what many men do, who are not brought to bed:
 Whereas that a son should be born of a lady,
 And none know the father, not even the Cadi,
 Or rather, that there's been no father at all,
 (For it couldn't be Peter, and couldn't be Paul,

EDITORIAL NOTES

¹ Leigh Hunt acknowledged authorship of this piece in the Preface to his *Ultra-Crepidarius* (1823). In this satire, Hunt compares contemporary critics and writers to the spider (See William H. Marshall, *Byron, Shelley, Hunt, and The Liberal*, Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1960, 171).

² Possible reference to John Payne Collyer (1789-1883), journalist, critic, and Shakespearean forger.

³ The poet laureate Robert "Bob" Southey (1774-1843). See n. 81 "The Book of Beginnings".

⁴ *I.e.*, *John Bull*, a Sunday newspaper published from 1820 to 1892, a champion of traditionalist conservatism. The name of the journal embraces John Bull, the satirical national personification of England created by John Arbuthnot in 1712.

⁵ Probably *The London Literary Gazette*, the journal established in 1817 by Henry Colburn, which reviewed bitterly the first issue of *The Liberal* (See William H. Marshall, *Byron, Shelley, Hunt, and The Liberal*, Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1960, 102).

⁶ Reference either to the philosopher James Mill (1773-1836), or to Henry Hart Milman (1791-1868), historian, poet, and dean of St Paul's. The second seems more likely, since Milman took orders in 1816 and in 1821 he was elected professor of poetry at Oxford. Hence Hunt's "profess Poetry".

⁷ Thomas Busby (1754-1838), composer, journalist, and author.

⁸ Reference to John Wilson (1785-1854), a close collaborator in the development of the *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* (see n. 21 below), appointed professor of Natural Philosophy at Edinburgh in 1820.

⁹ William Mudford (1782-1848), who at the time of publication owned the tory journal *The Courier* (1792-1842). As for the "poison", Hunt probably refers to the grim obituary published on *The Courier* upon Percy Shelley's death, where the poet had been called "a writer of infidel poetry" (August 5, 1822, 3). "Toad-eating" meant "sycophant".

¹⁰ At the time the piece was written, Theodore Edward Hook (1788-1841), writer and hoaxter, had been accused of a shortfall at Mauritius, where he had been accountant-general and treasurer from 1813 to 1817. His property was confiscated and he was later imprisoned, but made a living with his writing. In 1820 he created the *John Bull* as a means to gain King George IV's support against Queen Caroline by any possible means. "King Ehud" is a reference to King George IV: Ehud was an Old Testament patriarch who used assassination as political weapon. Therefore, Hook's "slanderizing" refers to the character assassination that he regularly performed for the King in his *John Bull*.

¹¹ Possible reference to William Gifford. Hunt might also be hinting at an episode involving Mary Robinson (1758-1800). Actress and former mistress of George IV (then Prince of Wales), then repudiated, she suffered in her late days an illness that left her partially paralised. In Hunt's words, "she fell under the lash of this masculine and gallant gentleman, Mr. Gifford, who, in his *Baviad and Maeviad* [1797] amused himself with tripping up her 'crutches', particularly as he thought her on her way to her last home. This he considered the climax of the fun" (Leigh Hunt, *The Autobiography of Leigh Hunt*, vol.1, 1850, 212).

¹² Tory satirist and poet George Croly (1780-1860), contributor to *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* (see n. 21 below).

¹³ Unidentified reference.

¹⁴ Gizzard is William Gifford (1756-1826), satirist and editor. From 1809 to 1824 he was editor of the *Quarterly Review*, which he founded with John Murray. See n. 16 "Advertisement to the Second Volume". The gizzard is a part of a bird's stomach but, informal and more generally, the innards or viscera.

¹⁵ William Gifford (1756-1826).

¹⁶ A degraded or base appearance.

¹⁷ In the Preface to *Ultra-Crepidarius* (1823), Hunt acknowledges authorship of the present poem, and writes that the *Ultra-Crepidarius* is "the 'stick' which is mentioned in the third issue of the *Liberal*, as having been cut for Mr. Gifford's special use" (Leigh Hunt, *The Poetical Works of Leigh Hunt*, ed. by H.S. Milford, New York: AMS Press, 1978, 711).

¹⁸ Reference to Hazlitt's 1819 "A Letter to William Gifford; ESQ."

¹⁹ Reference to Gifford's relationship with his housekeeper Ann Davies.

²⁰ Most likely a nickname for the publisher John Murray (1778-1843). Wordplay on "murrain", archaic word for an infectious disease, plague, pestilence.

EDITORIAL NOTES

²¹ The three main stakeholders in the *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, J.C. Lockhart, William Maginn, and John Wilson. The magazine was famously critical of Leigh Hunt: six articles published in the period 1817-19 refer to him as “King of the Cockneys”, leader of the “Cockney School of Poetry”, derogatory label signifying a mix of social climbing, vulgarity, ignorance and arrogance (see William H. Marshall, *Byron, Shelley, Hunt, and The Liberal*, Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1960, 43).

²² The aurora borealis.

²³ William Blackwood (1776-1834) (see n. 103 “My first Acquaintance with Poets”).

²⁴ Edmund Curll (1681-1747), bookseller. He is associated with unscrupulous publication for publishing pirate copies of Alexander Pope's poems and his *Dunciad*.

²⁵ Thomas Osborne (1704-67), bookseller. Like Curll, he was accused by Alexander Pope of publishing pirate copies of his works, particularly his translation of the *Iliad*.

²⁶ Possible reference to William Blackwood (1776-1834) (see n. 103 “My first Acquaintance with Poets”). “Blackguard” here means someone “who behaves in a dishonourable or contemptible way, someone worthless or despicable”, OED, “blackguard (n. & adj.)”.

²⁷ Reference to the lawsuits against the *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* following the publication of the “Cockney School of Poetry” articles. See n. 21 above.

²⁸ *I.e.*, his works; here “huff” means a gust or sudden swell of anger or arrogance.

²⁹ Sir Hudson Lowe (1769-1844), army officer and colonial governor. He guarded Napoleon at St Helena from 1815 until Napoleon's death in 1821. In 1823 he was involved in a controversy for his supposed abuses against Napoleon's doctor at St Helena, and his defence was published in the *Quarterly Review*.