

**'He spoke to Charles Lamb...': Reading and Performance in Hazlitt's
*Lectures Chiefly on the Dramatic Literature of the Age of Elizabeth***

1. O lad your Leonardos of Oxford made my mouth water...I had not settled my notions of Beauty. I have now forever – the small head, the long Eye – that sort of peering curve, the wicked Italian mischief, the sick-at-nothing Herodia's daughter-kind of grace[...]*I* have followed him in fancy ever since I saw him walking in Pall Mall (I was prejudiced against him before) looking just as a Hero should look[...]*W*hat other news is there, Mary? – What puns have I made in the last fortnight? You never remember them. You have no relish of the Comic. *O*f tell Hazlitt not to forget to send the American Farmer. I dare say it is't so good as he fancies: but a Book's a Book. – [...]*Y*ou send me a Modern quotation poetical. How do you like this in an old play – Vittoria Corombona a spunky Italian Lady, a Leonardo one, nick-named the White Devil, being on her trial for murder &c. – and questioned about seducing a Duke from his wife & the State, makes answer:

Condemn you me for that the Duke did love me?
So may you blame some fair & chrystal River
For that some melancholic distracted man
Hath drown'd himself in it. –

Charles Lamb-William Hazlitt, 10 November 1805: Edwin W. Marris, Jr, ed., *The Letters of Charles and Mary Lamb*, 3 vols (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1975-78), 2:108-89.

2. When he was about to write his "Lectures on the Age of Elizabeth," he knew little or nothing of the dramatists of that time, with the exception of Shakespeare. He spoke to Charles Lamb, and to myself, who were supposed by many to be well acquainted with those ancient writers. I lent him about a dozen volumes, comprehending the finest of the old plays; and he then went down to Winterslow Hut, in Wiltshire, and after a stay of six weeks came back to London, fully impregnated with the subject, with his thoughts fully made up upon it, and with all his lectures written.

Bryan Waller Procter, *An Autobiographical Fragment and Biographical Notes*, ed. C.K.D. Patmore (London: Bell and Sons, 1877), p.173.

3. The distinctions of dress, the badges of different professions, the very signs of the shops, which we have set aside for written inscriptions over the doors, were, as Mr Lamb observes, a sort of visible language to the imagination, and food for thought. (5.172)

William Hazlitt, *Lectures Chiefly on the Dramatic Literature of the Age of Elizabeth* (1820) in Duncan Wu, ed., *The Selected Writings of William Hazlitt*, 9 vols (London: Pickering & Chatto, 1998), 5.172.

4. The blank uniformity to which all professional distinctions in apparel have been long hastening, is one instance of the Decay of Symbols among us, which whether it has contributed or not to make us a more intellectual, has certainly made us a less imaginative people.

Charles Lamb, *Specimens of English Dramatic Poets who Lived About the Time of Shakespeare* (London: Longman, Hurst, Rees and Orme, 1808), p.84.

5. The same eye witness has ringing in his ear, after forty-seven years, the burden of the song in 'Gammer Gurton's Needle' – Jolly good ale and old. And he says that when the lecturer came to the last word he dwelt upon it, till it seemed to vibrate in the air, after it had left his lips, thus – Jolly good ale and OLD.

W. Carew Hazlitt, *Memoirs of William Hazlitt*, 2 vols (London: Bentley, 1867), 1:256-7.

6. He is lamentably deficient in the plot and denouement of the story. It is like the rough draft of a tragedy, with a number of fine things thrown in, and the best made use of first; but it tends to no fixed goal, and the interest decreases, instead of increasing, as we read on, for want of previous arrangement and an eye to the whole. We have fine studies of heads, a piece of richly-coloured drapery, 'a foot, an hand, an eye from Nature drawn, that's worth a history'; but the groups are ill-disposed, nor are the figures proportioned to each other or the size of the canvas. The author's power is *in* the subject, not *over* it, or he is in possession of excellent materials, which he husbands very ill. (*Selected Writings*, 3.196).

7. They thought less of their subject, and more of themselves, than some others. They had a great and unquestioned command over the stores both of fancy and passion; but they availed themselves too often of common-place extravagances and theatrical trick. (*Selected Writings*, 5.229)

8. Sir Thomas Brown has it, 'The huntsmen are up in America,' but Mr Coleridge prefers reading Arabia. I do not think his account of the Urn-Burial very happy. Sir Thomas can be said to be 'wholly in his subject' only because he is *wholly out of it*. (*Selected Writings*, 5.318n.)
9. [T]he lecture-room's uncertain position in late Georgian culture, somewhere between the church and the theatre. Lecturing can be regarded as a form of secular sermonizing which exploited the idea of enunciation as expressive of direct access to the divine at the same time as channelling such enthusiasm towards the ideals of Enlightenment science. Similarly, in his use of the arts of performance, the capacity to attract an audience through manipulation of speech and gesture, the lecturer could harness the power of the actor while importantly remaining in his own character, not subjecting himself or his audience to the uncertainties of impersonation.
Gillian Russell, 'Spouters or washerwomen: the sociability of Romantic lecturing' in Russell and Clara Tuite, eds, *Romantic Sociability: Social Networks and Literary Culture in Britain, 1770-1840* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), pp.123-44.
10. We find here...the first instance of the theatrical *double entendre* which has been repeated ever since of an actor's ironically abusing himself in his feigned character.
Gervase They say Green's a good clown.
Babbalanza (Plays by Green; says) Green! Green's an ass.
Scattergood Wherefore do you say so?
Bob Indeed, I ha' no reason; for they say he's as like me as ever he can look. (*Selected Writings*, 5.209)
11. In short, the great characteristic of the elder dramatic writers is, that there is nothing theatrical about them. In reading them, you only think how the persons, into whose mouths certain sentiments are put, would have spoken or looked: in reading Dryden and others of that school, you only think, as the authors themselves seem to have done, how they would be ranted on the stage by some huskied hero or tragedy-queen... The characters of their heroes have not been cut down to fit into the prompt-book, nor have we ever seen their names flaming in the play-bills in small or large capitals. – I do not mean to speak disrespectfully of the stage; but I think higher still of nature, and next to that, of books. (*Selected Writings*, 5.227)
12. S.T.C. is lecturing with success. I have not heard either him or H. but I dined with S.T.C. at Giltian's a Sunday or two since and he was well and in good spirits. I mean to hear some of the course, but lectures are not much to my taste, whatever the lecturer may be. If read, they are dismal flat, and you can't think why you are brought together to hear a man read his works which you could read so much better at leisure yourself; if delivered extempore, I am always in pain lest the gift of utterance should suddenly fail the orator in the middle, as it did me at the dinner given in honour of me at the London Tavern.
Charles Lamb-Mary Wordsworth, 18 February 1818: E.V. Lucas, ed., *The Complete Letters of Charles & Mary Lamb*, 3 vols (London: Dent and Methuen, 1935), 2.227.
13. So to see Lear acted, - to see an old man tottering about the stage with a walking-stick, turned out of doors by his daughters in a rainy night, has nothing in it but what is painful and disgusting. We want to take him into shelter and relieve him. That is all the feeling which the acting of Lear ever produced in me. But the Lear of Shakspeare cannot be acted.
'On the Tragedies of Shakspeare, Considered with Reference to their Fitness for Stage Representation': E.V. Lucas, ed., *The Works of Charles and Mary Lamb*, 7 vols (London: Methuen, 1905), 1.107.
14. He was not so nervous as he had been on the two prior occasions; but a person who was present tells me that he hunched up his knee-breeches continually in a very distressing manner, for they kept slipping over his hips through the want of braces, and disclosing bits of shirt.
W.Carew Hazlitt, *Memoirs*, 2.256.
15. I have half trifled with this subject; and I believe I have done so, because I despaired of finding a language for some old rooted feelings I have about it, which a theory could neither give or can it take away. The Robbers was the first play I ever read: and the effect it produced upon me was the greatest. It stunned me like a blow, and I have not recovered enough from it to describe how it was. There are impressions which neither time nor circumstance can efface. (*Selected Writings*, 5.338)
16. I have done; and if I have done no better, the fault has been in me, not in the subject. (*Selected Writings*, 5.339)