

# **Ultra-Crepidarius**

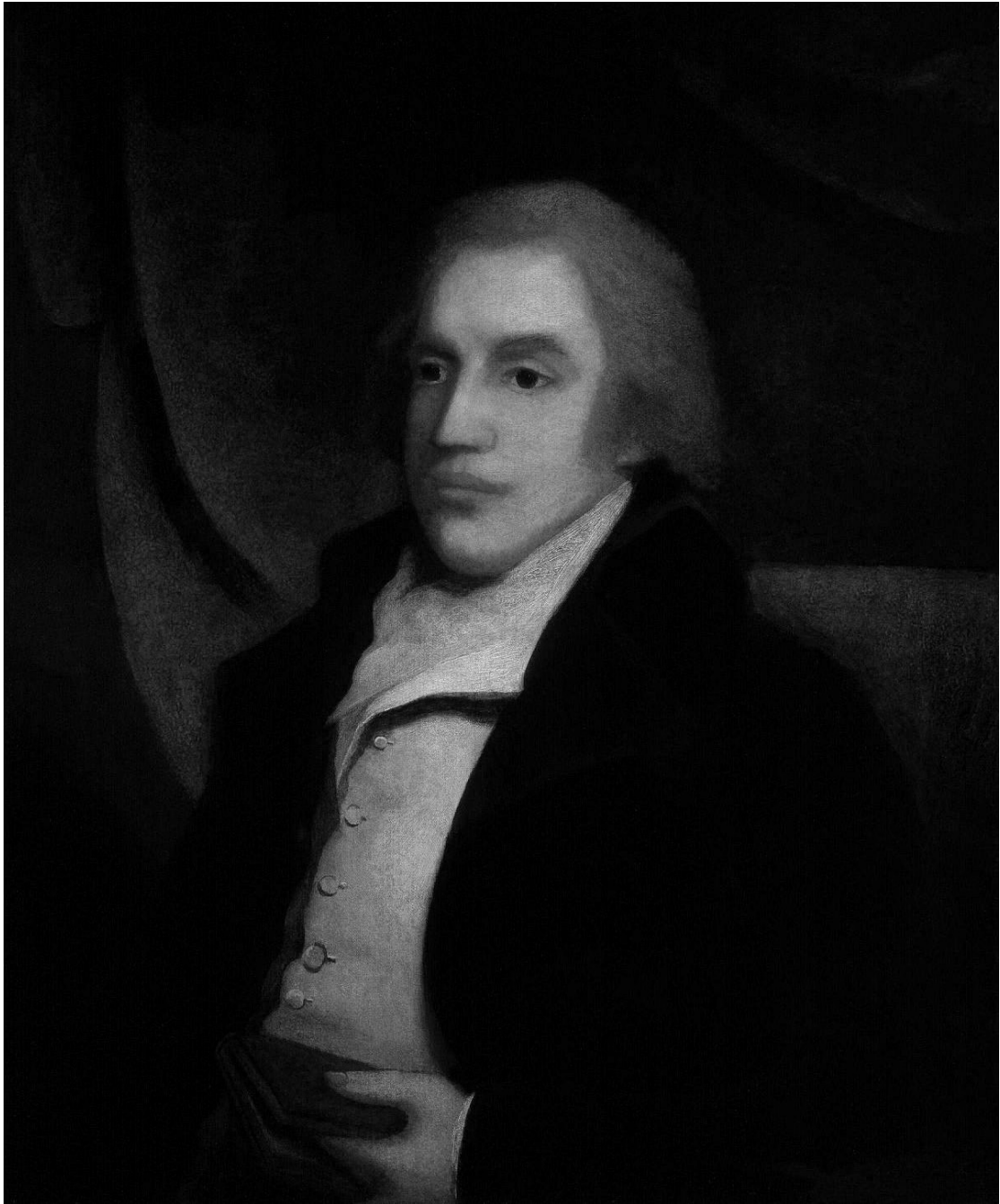
A Satire on  
William Gifford

**By**  
**Leigh Hunt**  
**And**  
**William Hazlitt**

With an Introduction  
by  
Edmund Gosse

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Portrait of William Gifford by John Hopner

Ultra-Crepidarius

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## Introduction by Edmund Gosse

If the collector of first editions requires an instance from which to justify the faith which is in him against those who cry out that bibliography is naught, Leigh Hunt is a good example to his hand. This active and often admirable writer, during a busy professional life, issued a long series of works in prose and verse which are of every variety of commonness and scarcity, but which have never been, and probably never will be, reprinted as a whole. Yet not to possess the works of Leigh Hunt is to be ill-equipped for the minute study of literary history at the beginning of the century. The original 1816 edition of *Rimini*, for instance, is of a desperate rarity, yet not to be able to refer to it in the grotesqueness of this its earliest form is to miss a most curious proof of the crude taste of the young school out of which Shelley and Keats were to arise. The scarcest of all Leigh Hunt's poetical pamphlets, but by no means the least interesting, is that whose title stands at the head of this chapter. Of *Ultra-crepidarius*, which was "printed for John Hunt" in 1823, it is believed that not half a dozen copies are in existence, and it has never been reprinted. It is a rarity, then, to which the most austere despisers of first editions may allow a special interest.

From internal evidence we find that *Ultra-crepidarius; a Satire on William Gifford*, was sent to press in the summer of 1823, from Maiano, soon after the break-up of Hunt's household in Genoa, and Byron's departure for Greece. The poem is the "stick" which had been recently mentioned in the third number of the *Liberal*:

Have I, these five years, spared the dog a stick,  
Cut for his special use, and reasonably thick?

It had been written in 1818, in consequence of the famous review in the *Quarterly* of Keats's *Endymion*, a fact which the biographers of Keats do not seem to have observed. Why did Hunt not immediately print it? Perhaps because to have done so would have been worse than useless in the then condition of public taste and temper. What led Hunt to break through his intention of suppressing the poem it might be difficult to discover. At all events, in the summer of 1823 he suddenly sent it home for publication; whether it was actually published is doubtful, it was probably only circulated in private to a handful of sympathetic Tory-hating friends.

*Ultra-crepidarius* is written in the same anapaestic measure as *The Feast of the Poets*, but is somewhat longer. As a satire on William Gifford it possessed the disadvantage of coming too late in the day to be of any service to anybody. At the close of 1823 Gifford, in failing health, was resigning the editorial chair of the *Quarterly*, which he had made so formidable, and was retiring into private life, to die in 1826. The poem probably explains, however, what has always seemed a little difficult to comprehend, the extreme personal bitterness with which Gifford, at the close of his career, regarded Hunt, since the slayer of the Della Cruscan was not the man to tolerate being treated as though he were a Della Cruscan himself. However narrow the circulation of *Ultra-crepidarius* may have been, care was no doubt taken that the editor of the *Quarterly Review* should receive one copy at his private address, and Leigh Hunt returned from Italy in time for that odd incident to take place at the Roxburgh sale, when Barron Field called his attention to the fact that "a little man, with a warped frame, and a countenance between the querulous and the angry, was gazing at me with all his might." Hunt tells this story in the *Autobiography*, from which, however, he omits all allusion to his satire.

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The latter opens with the statement that:

'Tis now about fifty or sixty years since  
(The date of a charming old boy of a Prince)–

Mercury was in a state of rare fidget from the discovery that he had lost one of his precious winged shoes, and had in consequence dawdled away a whole week in company with Venus, not having dreamed that it was that crafty goddess herself, who, wishing for a pair of them, had sent one of Mercury's shoes down to Ashburton for a pattern. Venus confesses her peccadillo, and offers to descend to the Devonshire borough with her lover, and see what can have become of the ethereal shoe. As they reach the ground, they meet with an ill-favoured boot of leather, which acknowledges that it has ill-treated the delicate slipper of Mercury. This boot, of course, is Gifford, who had been a shoemaker's apprentice in Ashburton. Mercury curses this unsightly object, and part of his malediction may here be quoted.

I hear someone say "Murrain take him, the ape!"  
And so Murrain shall, in a bookseller's shape;  
An evil-eyed elf, in a down-looking flurry,  
Who'd fain be a coxcomb, and calls himself Murray.  
Adorn thou his door, like the sign of the Shoe,  
For court-understrappers to congregate to;  
For Southey to come, in his dearth of invention,  
And eat his own words for mock-praise and a pension;  
For Croker to lurk with his spider-like limb in,  
And stock his lean bag with waylaying the women;  
And Jove only knows for what creatures beside  
To shelter their envy and dust-liking pride,  
And feed on corruption, like bats, who at nights,  
In the dark take their shuffles, which they call then flights;  
Be these the court-critics and vamp a Review.  
And by a poor figure, and therefore a true,  
For it suits with thy nature, both shoe-like and slaughterly  
Be its hue leathern, and title the Quarterly,  
Much misconduct, and see that the others  
Misdeem, and misconstrue, like miscreant brothers;  
Misquote, and misplace, and mislead, and misstate,  
Misapply, misinterpret, misreckon, misdate,  
Misinform, misconjecture, misargue; in short,  
Miss all that is good, that ye miss not the Court.

\* \* \* \* \*

And finally, thou, my old soul of the tritical,  
Noting, translating, high slavish, hot critical,  
Quarterly-scutcheon'd, great heir to each dunce,  
Be Tibbald, Cook, Arnall, and Dennis at once

At the end, Mercury dooms the ugly boot to take the semblance of a man, and the satire closes with its painful metamorphosis into Gifford. The poem is not without cleverness, but it is chiefly remarkable for a savage tone which is not, we think, repeated elsewhere throughout the writings of Hunt. The allusions to Gifford's relations, nearly half a century earlier, to that Earl Grosvenor who first rescued him from poverty, the well-deserved scorn of his intolerable sneers at Perdita Robinson's crutches:

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Hate Woman, thou block in the path of fair feet;  
If Fate want a hand to distress them, thine be it;  
When the Great, and their flourishing vices, are mention'd  
Say people "impute" 'em, and show thou art pension'd;  
But meet with a Prince's old mistress discarded,  
And *then* let the world see how vice is rewarded—

the indications of the satirist's acquaintance with the private life of his victim, all these must have stung the editor of the *Quarterly* to the quick, and are very little in Hunt's usual manner, though he had examples for them in Peter Pindar and others. There is a very early allusion to "Mr. Keats and Mr. Shelley," where, "calm, up above thee, they soar and they shine." This was written immediately after the review of *Endymion* in the *Quarterly*.

At the close is printed an extremely vigorous onslaught of Hazlitt's upon Gifford, which is better known than the poem which it illustrates. In itself, in its preface, and in its notes alike this very rare pamphlet presents us with a genuine curiosity of literature.

From *Gossip in a Library*, 1891.

**Ultra-crepidarius**  
*by Leigh Hunt*

Tis now fifty or sixty years since,  
(The date of a charming old boy of a Prince)  
Since the feathered god Mercury happened to lose  
A thing no less precious than one of his shoes:  
I say no less precious, because in the mention  
The artist has made of this very invention,  
(Old Homer, who furnished the gods with such things)  
He says, 'twas immortal, of gold, and had wings.  
The latter indeed are as famous as Love's,  
And they rivalled in hue even Venus's doves;  
For at every fresh turn, and least touch into light,  
Which the clear God of Eloquence took in his flight,  
They varied their colours in fifty directions,  
And perfectly dazzled with brilliant reflections.

'I wonder,' said Mercury, — putting his head  
One rosy-faced morning from Venus's bed,—  
'I wonder, my dear Cytherea, — don't you?—  
What can have become of that rogue of a shoe.  
I've searched every corner to make myself certain,  
And lifted, I'm sure, ev'ry possible curtain,  
And how I'm to manage, by Jove, I don't know,  
For manage I must, and to earth I must go.  
'Tis now a whole week since I lost it; and here,  
Like a dove whom your urchin has crippled, my dear,  
Have I loitered, and fluttered, and looked in those eyes,  
While Juno keeps venting her crabbed surprise;  
And Apollo, with all that fine faith in his air,  
Asks me daily accounts of Rousseau and Voltaire,  
And Jove (whom it's awkward to risk such a thing with)  
Has not enough thunder to frighten a king with.  
So — there then — now don't look so kind, I beseech you,  
Or else I shall stay a week longer, you witch you—  
I can't ask the gods; but I'll search once again  
For this fugitive shoe, and if still it's in vain,  
I must try to make something a while of sheer leather,  
And match with a mortal my fair widowed feather.'

So saying, the God put a leg out of bed,  
And summoned his winged cap on to his head;  
And the widow in question flew smack round his foot,  
And up he was getting to end his pursuit,  
When Venus said softly (so softly, that he  
Turned about on his elbow) — 'What! go without me?'

Now the fact was, that Venus, who always would please a  
Fine wit, had been reading the New Eloisa,  
And having prodigiously felt and admired it,  
Couldn't but say so to him who inspired it.

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Therefore, to take the due steps for expressing  
Her sense of such very well-worded caressing,  
She had sent down to earth this same Shoe with an errand  
To get a new pair at Ashburton for her, and  
Not think of returning without what it went for,  
Unless by its master especially sent for.

The Shoe made a scrape; and concluding the thing  
Had been settled 'twixt her and his master, took wing;  
And never ceased beating through sunshine and rain,  
Now clasped in a cloud, and now loosened again,  
Till it came to Ashburton, where something so odd  
Seemed to strike it, it could not help saying, 'My God!'

I know not precisely how much of this matter  
Was mentioned, when Mercury sparkled round at her;  
But Venus proposed, that as one Shoe was fled,  
Her good easy virtue should help him instead  
'You know, love,' said she, 'tis as light as a feather;  
And so I'll be guide, and we'll go down together.'

I leave you to fancy how little he checked her:  
They chalked out their journey, got up, took their nectar;  
And then, with his arm round her waist, and his eyes  
Looking thanks upon hers, came away from the skies.

I cannot, I own, say he came much the faster,  
How earnest soever he looked and embraced her;  
But never before, though a God of much grace,  
Had he come with such fine overlooking of face;  
And as she travelled seldom herself in this style,  
With a lover beside her, and clasped all the while,  
'Tis said that the earth was remarkably moved:  
Even marriers for money imagined they loved:  
Yes, inanimate things fell exchanging caresses,  
Till Princes embraced their own legal Princesses:  
Not one pair of birds or respectable brutes,  
Nay, not one of gloves, but, they say, followed suits,  
And the bishops but walked in the steps of their boots.

All felt but one Shoe. — O ye gods from above,  
Who descended that day with your wit and your love,  
Assist now my theme, which grows dark at the touch,  
That I neither may honour nor hate it too much!  
Yes, all but one Shoe: not the shoe that was missing,  
For that one, as much as lay in it, loved kissing;  
But one which as Venus and Mercury put up  
Somewhere at Ashburton, nigh tripped her sweet foot up.

The kind Goddess (one of whose charmingest qualities  
'Tis, at a small thing, to reckon how small it is)  
Laughed, and said, 'Well, who'd have thought this of you,  
With that drag in your aspect, my poor little Shoe?  
Here, come kiss my foot, as a proof we agree!'



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But the Shoe huffed, — as who should say, 'Don't talk to me'  
'It wants comprehension,' said Mercury, 'surely,  
And yet there seems life in it, though it looks poorly.  
Int'rest, I dare say, will make something of it:  
My strange little friend, don't you know your own profit?'  
'Aye, aye, well enough,' said the Shoe in a tone  
Of uneasy contempt, 'twixt a creak and a groan  
'I was made for a Squire; and my instinct has told me,  
That if through the dirt with discretion I hold me  
My service, some day, will be under an Earl,  
Which I think's something higher than you and your girl.'

At this, the two Deities set up a shout,  
Which made all the neighbours leap up and look out:  
For they thought 'twas the players with music at least,  
Or that London, or Heaven, was come from the east.  
But the Shoe, deaf and blind to all beautiful things,  
Scarce showed more emotion than if 'twere a king's:  
It did, indeed, slightly perk up its two straps,  
Like the ears of an ass, when he's sulky, and snaps.

The lovers perceived that it knew not their rank,  
Or 'twould no more have spurned 'em than kicked at the bank  
'Twas this that amused 'em. 'But pray, Sir,' said they,  
'What induced your high Heel-tap to get in our way?'

'Why, I can't bear,' returned this most cross-grained of leathers,  
'To look at your shoe there, tricked out in such feathers.  
Why need any shoe be more gifted than I?  
There was just such another' — (here Venus looked sly,  
And Hermes guessed all she'd omitted to say)—  
'Here was just such another came mincing this way,  
And would fain have come in for some shoes for a Lady;  
But no, no; I trod on his toes with a 'Hey-day!'  
On which the fop gave me a cuff with his quill,  
And whisked away laughing; but I'll pity him still.'

'You had better be quiet,' said Hermes, 'for stuff,  
Such as yours, can no more wage war with his cuff  
Than the monster with Perseus, who fell on him, plumed.'  
'I know,' said the Shoe, as it fretted and fumed.  
'You do?' said the God; 'then with such an example  
How monsters should treat the fair sex, would you trample  
Or offer to do it (for so it now seems)  
On a foot which surpasses a lover's best dreams?'

'I hate your surpassings, and loves, and all that,'  
Cried the Shoe, screaming weak like a leather-toed bat;  
'And since you will have it, I tell you, you fop,  
That I'd kick the best shoe ever stepped into shop.'

But now the God, angered, shot into that leather  
A terrible sense of who stood there together,

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And while it slunk, shaking, half into itself,  
Denounced it in words, that shall die on no shelf:—

'Vile Soul of a Shoe, — that with decent self-knowledge  
Had honoured the good man that made thee at college,  
And walked through the world, if with not many graces,  
At least in good steps and calm classical places,  
My very stray slipper that passed thee, and hit,  
Might have done thee some good, for it brushed thee with wit;  
But every thing, even Adversity fails,  
To refine the grain in thee: the calf-skin prevails.  
Attend then my curse, while thou shrinkest into thee,  
And let the ambition thou spoilest, undo thee.

'As soon as I finish my words, thou shalt be,  
Not a man, for thou canst not, but human to see:  
Thy appearance at least shall be taken for human,  
However perplexing to painter or woman.  
In ev'ry thing else, thou shalt be as thou art,  
A thing made for dirty ways, hollow at heart.  
Serve an Earl, as thou say'st; and, in playing the shoe.  
Let the stories told of thee, malicious or true,  
Only lead thee hereafter to scandalize too.  
But let not an Earl stop thy progress; go higher,  
And at every new step show addition of mire,  
Like one, who, in climbing a loose-moulded hill,  
Finds his foot growing heavier and dirtier still,  
Strain after all those, who ascend to the crown;  
But all who are falling, assist to kick down:  
Then getting at top, gape with sycophant joy,  
And poking about for becoming employ,  
Make signs thou art ready, with pliable span,  
To clasp any foot, that would trample on mail.  
But despair of those nobler ascents, which thou'lt see  
Stretching far overhead with the Delphian tree,—  
Holy ground, to climb up to whose least laurelled shelf  
Thou would'st have to change natures, and put off thyself.  
Stop, and strain at the base; yet, to ease thy despair,  
Do thy best to obstruct all the feet that come there,  
Especially younger ones, winged like mine  
Till bright, up above thee, they soar and they shine.'  
Should even the graves, such as lie near the spot,  
Of critics and note-makers, help thee a jot  
Be sure to pretend that the heap's of no use  
And repay those who gave thee a lift with abuse.  
Dig into their errors, their merits conceal  
And then shudder to think that the dead can not feel.  
All things, in short, petty and fit, say and do  
Becoming a man with the soul of a shoe.  
Boast thy origin once, because good common-place  
Has pronounced such behaviour a merit and grace;

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But after that once, be consistent, and show  
A great horror of lowness, because it is low:  
Pick out for thy path, through the region of letters,  
The very worst tracks that dishonoured thy betters;  
Like boys, who to get a sensation and splutter,  
Prefer, to the pavement, a kick through the gutter:  
Thus, edit no authors but such as unite  
With their talents a good deal of dirt or of spite;  
Ben Jonson, because he was beastly and bluff;  
And Massinger,—mince through his loathsomer stuff  
And Persius,—"let him be writ down" Imitated  
And say to poor Juvenal, "Thou art translated."  
These Latins will help too thy fondest of penchants,  
And swell thy large hate with the hates of the ancients.  
But as for such writers as Shakespeare and others,—  
Low fellows, who treated all men as their brothers,  
Base panders, whose heads ran on love and a wood,  
Blasphemers, who thought the great Jupiter good,  
Who had right to be naked, and yet not ashamed,—  
Be sure to inform us, that they may be damned.  
I hear someone say, "Murrain take him, the ape!"  
And so Murrain shall, in a bookseller's shape;  
An evil-eyed elf, in a down-looking flurry,  
Who'd fain be a coxcomb, and calls himself Murray.  
Adorn thou his door, like the sign of the Shoe  
For court-understrappers to congregate to  
For Southey to come, in his dearth of invention,  
And eat his own words for mock-praise and a pension;  
For Croker to lurk with his spider-like limb in,  
And stock his lean bag with way-laying the women;  
And Jove only knows for what creatures beside  
To shelter their envy and dust-licking pride,  
And feed on corruption, like bats, who at nights  
In the dark take their shuffles, which they call their flights.  
Be these the Court-critics, and vamp a Review;  
And by a poor figure, and therefore a true,  
For it suits with thy nature, both shoe-like and slaughterly,  
Be its hue leathern, and title the Quarterly.  
Much misconduct it, and see that the others  
Misdeem, and misconstrue, like miscreant brothers;  
Misquote, and misplace, and mislead, and misstate,  
Misapply, misinterpret, misreckon, misdate,  
Misinform, misconjecture, misargue in short,  
Miss all that is good, that ye miss not the Court.  
Count the worth of a mind, not from what it produces,  
But what it will take to fall in with abuses.  
Is anyone ardent, sincere, independent?  
What distancing virtue! Pray try make an end on't.  
Does any discover what you never could?  
Pretend it's a trifle no gentleman would.

## Ultra-Crepidarius

Does a true taste appear for the authors you edit?  
Take pains, by your scorn, to show you never had it.  
In short, be the true Representative Tool  
Of a whole "Court of Cobblers" got up into rule.  
Alas for the country of Harley and Prior!  
But office shall then be a shop so entire  
For any dull fellow to keep that can serve,  
While Britons, turned beggars, are told to go starve,  
That a whole set of dunces, — yes, Pope, thine own band,  
Thy Dunciad itself, shall rule over the land!  
As gutters dive down to re-issue in ditches,  
Thy divers for pay shall emerge with new riches.  
Then quality's fools, long be-libelled in vain,  
In the Stuarts, the Georges, and "Jenkies" shall reign:  
Then Cymons (not Greek, nor yet mended by Cupid)  
Shall lord it with faces triumphant as stupid:  
Happy Page shall be Best, well aware of his fury,  
Concanen be Croker, and Lintot be Murray:  
In Southey poor Blackmore, beginning to doat,  
Shall not only turn a new stave, but his coat:  
The Wards and the Welsteds shall pamper their spleens,  
And club in Scotch papers and Scotch Magazines:  
And finally, thou, my old soul of the tritical,  
Noting, translating, high slavish, hot critical,  
Quarterly-scutcheoned, great heir to each dunce,  
Be Tibbald, Cook, Arnall, and Dennis at once."  
In one thing alone display nothing in common  
With dunce any more than with genius, — hate woman.'  
(Here Venus entreated, and fain would have gone,  
But the God only clasped her the more, and went on:)  
'Hate woman, thou block in the path of fair feet;  
If Fate want a hand to distress them, thing be it;  
When the Great, and their flourishing vices, are mentioned,  
Say people "impute" 'em, and show thou art pensioned;  
But meet with a Prince's old mistress discarded,  
And then let the world see how vice is rewarded.'

He said. The poor Shoe, turning restless and wan,  
Gave a groan, and began struggling up into man.  
First the straps, falling stiffly, and thrusting the ground,  
Became arms, by whose help it arose, turning round;  
Then the toe split in two, and increasing in size,  
Undertook to support him as legs and as thighs;  
And lastly from out of the quartering there looked  
A face at once lachrymose rude, and rebuked.  
Such a face! Such a spirit! For what is a face,  
But what the soul makes it, for worth or disgrace?

Like a rogue from a regiment be-drummed and fifed,  
It slunk out of doors, and men called the thing GIFFORD.

**Mr. Gifford**  
*by William Hazlitt*

MR. GIFFORD was originally bred to some handicraft. He afterwards contrived to learn Latin, and was for some time an usher in a school, till he became a tutor in a nobleman's family. The low-bred, self-taught man, the pedant, and the dependent on the great, contribute to form the Editor of the *Quarterly Review*. He is admirably qualified for this situation, which he has held for some years, by a happy combination of defects, natural and acquired; and in the event of his death it will be difficult to provide him a suitable successor.

Mr. Gifford has no pretensions to be thought a man of genius, of taste, or even of general knowledge. He merely understands the mechanical and instrumental part of learning. He is a critic of the last age, when the different editions of an author or the dates of his several performances were all that occupied the inquiries of a profound scholar, and the spirit of the writer or the beauties of his style were left to shift for themselves, or exercise the fancy of the light and superficial reader. In studying an old author, he has no notion of anything beyond adjusting a point, proposing a different reading, or correcting, by the collation of various copies, an error of the press.

In appreciating a modern one, if it is an enemy, the first thing he thinks of is to charge him with bad grammar: he scans his sentences instead of weighing his sense; or if it is a friend, the highest compliment he conceives it possible to pay him is, that his thoughts and expressions are moulded on some hackneyed model. His standard of ideal perfection is what he himself now is, a person of mediocre literary attainments: his utmost contempt is shown by reducing anyone to what he himself once was, a person without the ordinary advantages of education and learning. It is accordingly assumed with much complacency in his critical pages, that Tory writers are classical and courtly as a matter of course, as it is a standing jest and evident truism that Whigs and Reformers must be persons of low birth and breeding, imputations from one of which he himself has narrowly escaped, and both of which he holds in suitable abhorrence. He stands over a contemporary performance with all the self-conceit and self-importance of a country schoolmaster, tries it by technical rules, affects not to understand the meaning; examines the hand-writing, the spelling, shrugs up his shoulders and chuckles over a slip of the pen, and keeps a sharp look-out for a false concord and-a flogging.

There is nothing liberal, nothing humane in his style of judging: it is altogether petty, captious, and literal. The Editor's political subserviency adds the last finishing to his ridiculous pedantry and vanity. He has all his life been a follower in the train of wealth and power, strives to back his pretensions on Parnassus by a place at court, and to gild his reputation as a man of letters by the smile of greatness. He thinks his works are stamped with additional value by having his name in the Red-Book. He looks up to the distinctions of rank and station as he does to those of learning, with the gross and over-weening adulation of his early origin. All his notions are low, upstart, servile. He thinks it the highest honour to a poet to be patronised by a peer or by some dowager of quality. He is prouder of a court-livery than of a laurel-wreath; and is only sure of having established his claims to respectability by having sacrificed those of independence. He is a retainer to the Muses, a door-keeper to learning, a lacquey in the State. He believes that modern literature should wear the fetters of classical

antiquity; that truth is to be weighed in the scales of opinion and prejudice; that power is equivalent to right; that genius is dependent on rules; that taste and refinement of language consist in word-catching.

Many persons suppose that Mr. Gifford knows better than he pretends, and that he is shrewd, artful and designing. But perhaps it may be nearer the mark to suppose that his dulness is guarantee for his sincerity, or that, before he is the tool of the profligacy of others, he is the dupe of his own jaundiced feelings and narrow, hoodwinked perceptions.

'Destroy his fib or sophistry: in vain--  
The creature's at his dirty work again!'

But this is less from choice or perversity, than because he cannot help it, and can do nothing else. He damns a beautiful expression less out of spite than because he really does not understand it; any novelty of thought or sentiment gives him a shock from which he cannot recover for some time; and he naturally takes his revenge for the alarm and uneasiness occasioned him without referring to venal or party motives. He garbles an author's meaning, not so much wilfully, as because it is a pain to him to enlarge his microscopic view to take in the context, when a particular sentence or passage has struck him as quaint and out of the way. He fly-blows an author's style, and picks out detached words and phrases for cynical reprobation, simply because he feels himself at home, or takes a pride and pleasure in this sort of petty warfare. He is tetchy and impatient of contradiction, sore with wounded pride, angry at obvious faults, more angry at unforeseen beauties. He has the chalk-stones in his understanding, and from being used to long confinement, cannot bear the slightest jostling or irregularity of motion. He may call out with the fellow in the *Tempest* 'I am not Stephano, but a cramp!'

He would go back to the standard of opinions, style, faded ornaments and insipid formalities that came into fashion about forty years ago. Flashes of thought, flights of fancy, idiomatic expressions, he sets down among the signs of the times, the extraordinary occurrences of the age we live in. They are marks of a restless and revolutionary spirit: they disturb his composure of mind, and threaten (by implication) the safety of the State. His slow, snail-paced, bed-rid habits of reasoning cannot keep up with the whirling, eccentric motion, the rapid, perhaps extravagant combinations of modern literature. He has long been stationary himself, and is determined that others shall remain so. The hazarding a paradox is like letting off a pistol close to his ear: he is alarmed and offended. The using an elliptical mode of expression (such as he did not use to find in *Guides to the English Tongue*) jars him like coming suddenly to a step in a flight of stairs that you were not aware of. He pishes and pshaws at all this, exercises a sort of interjectional criticism on what excites his spleen, his envy or his wonder, and hurls his meagre anathemas *ex cathedra* at all those writers who are indifferent alike to his precepts and his example!

Mr. Gifford, in short, is possessed of that sort of learning which is likely to result from an over-anxious desire to supply the want of the first rudiments of education: that sort of wit which is the offspring of ill-humour or bodily pain: that sort of sense which arises from a spirit of contradiction and a disposition to cavil at and dispute the opinions of others: and that sort of reputation which is the consequence of bowing to established authority and ministerial influence. He dedicates to some great

man, and receives his compliments in return. He appeals to some great name, and the Undergraduates of the two Universities look up to him as an oracle of wisdom. He throws the weight of his verbal criticism and puny discoveries in black-letter reading into the gap, that is supposed to be making in the Constitution by Whig's and Radicals, whom he qualifies without mercy as dunces and miscreants, and so entitles himself to the protection of the Church and State. The character of his mind is an utter want of independence and magnanimity in all that he attempts. He cannot go alone; he must have crutches, a go-cart and trammels, or he is timid, fretful and helpless as a child. He cannot conceive of anything different from what he finds it, and hates those who pretend to a greater reach of intellect or boldness of spirit than himself. He inclines, by a natural and deliberate bias, to the traditional in laws and government, to the orthodox in religion, to the safe in opinion, to the trite in imagination, to the technical in style, to whatever implies a surrender of individual judgment into the hands of authority and a subjection of individual feeling to mechanic rules.

If he finds anyone flying in the face of these, or straggling from the beaten path, he thinks he has them at a notable disadvantage, and falls foul of them without loss of time, partly to soothe his own sense of mortified self-consequence, and as an edifying spectacle to his legitimate friends. He takes none but unfair advantages. He twits his adversaries (that is, those who are not in the leading-strings of his school or party) with some personal or accidental defect. If a writer has been punished for a political libel, he is sure to hear of it in a literary criticism. If a lady goes on crutches and is out of favour at court, she is reminded of it in Mr. Gifford's manly satire. He sneers at people of low birth or who have not had a college education, partly to hide his own want of certain advantages, partly as well-timed flattery to those who possess them. He has a right to laugh at poor, unfriended, untitled genius from wearing the livery of rank and letters, as footmen behind a coronet-coach laugh at the rabble. He keeps good company, and forgets himself. He stands at the door of Mr. Murray's shop, and will not let any body pass but the well-dressed mob or some followers of the court. To edge into the *Quarterly* Temple of Fame the candidate must have a diploma from the Universities, a passport from the Treasury. Otherwise, it is a breach of etiquette to let him pass, an insult to the better sort who aspire to the love of letters, and may chance to drop in to the *Feast of the Poets*. Or, if he cannot manage it thus, or get rid of the claim on the bare ground of poverty or want of school-learning, he trumps up an excuse for the occasion, such as that 'a man was confined in Newgate a short time before.' It is not a lie on the part of the critic; it is only an amiable subserviency to the will of his betters, like that of a menial who is ordered to deny his master: a sense of propriety, a knowledge of the world, a poetical and moral license. Such fellows (such is his cue from his employers) should at any rate be kept out of privileged places: persons who have been convicted of prose-libels ought not to be suffered to write poetry. If the fact was not exactly as it was stated, it was something of the kind, or it ought to have been so; the assertion was a pious fraud; the public, the court, the prince himself might read the work, but for this mark of opprobrium set upon it. It was not to be endured that an insolent plebeian should aspire to elegance, taste, fancy; it was throwing down the barriers which ought to separate the higher and the lower classes, the loyal and the disloyal. The paraphrase of the story of Dante was therefore to perform quarantine; it was to seem not yet recovered from the gaol infection; there was to be a taint upon it, as there was none in it; and all this was performed by a single slip of Mr. Gifford's pen! We would willingly believe (if we

could) that in this case there was as much weakness and prejudice as there was malice and cunning.

Again, we do not think it possible that under any circumstances the writer of the *Verses to Anna* could enter into the spirit or delicacy of [Mr. Keats'](#) poetry. The fate of the latter somewhat resembled that of

'a bud bit by an envious worm,  
Ere it could spread its sweet leaves to the air,  
Or dedicate its beauty to the sun.'

Mr. Keats' ostensible crime was that he had been praised in the *Examiner* newspaper; a greater and more unpardonable offence probably was that he was a true poet, with all the errors and beauties of youthful genius to answer for. Mr. Gifford was as insensible to the one as he was inexorable to the other. Let the reader judge from the two subjoined specimens how far the one writer could ever, without a presumption equalled only by a want of self-knowledge, set himself in judgment on the other.

'Out went the taper as she hurried in;  
Its little smoke in pallid moonshine died:  
She closed the door, she panted, all akin  
To spirits of the air and visions wide:  
No utter'd syllable, or woe betide!  
But to her heart, her heart was voluble,  
Paining with eloquence her balmy side;  
As though a tongueless nightingale should swell  
Her heart in vain, and die, heart-stifled, in her dell.  
'A casement high and triple-arch'd there was,  
All garlanded with carven imag'ries  
Of fruits and flowers, and bunches of knot-grass,  
And diamonded with panes of quaint device,  
Innumerable of stains and splendid dyes,  
As are the tiger-moth's deep-damask'd wings;  
And in the midst, 'mong thousand heraldries,  
And twilight saints and dim emblazonings,  
A shielded scutcheon blush'd with blood of queens and kings.  
'Full on this casement shone the wintry moon,  
And threw warm gules on Madeline's fair breast,  
As down she knelt for Heaven's grace and boon;  
Rose-bloom fell on her hands, together prest,  
And on her silver cross soft amethyst,  
And on her hair a glory, like a saint.  
She seem'd a splendid angel, newly drest,  
Save wings, for Heaven: -- Porphyro grew faint:  
She knelt, so pure a thing, so free from mortal taint.  
'Anon his heart revives: her vespers done,  
Of all its wreathed pearls her hair she frees;  
Unclasps her warmed jewels one by one;  
Loosens her fragrant bodice; by degrees  
Her rich attire creeps rustling to her knees:



## Ultra-Crepidarius

Half-hidden, like a mermaid in sea-weed,  
Pensive awhile she dreams awake, and sees,  
In fancy, fair St. Agnes in her bed,  
But dares not look behind, or all the charm is fled.  
'Soon trembling in her soft and chilly nest,  
In sort of wakeful swoon, perplex'd she lay,  
Until the poppi'd warmth of sleep oppress'd  
Her soothed limbs, and soul fatigued away:  
Flown, like a thought, until the morrow-day:  
Blissfully haven'd both from joy and pain;  
Clasp'd like a missal where swart Paynims pray;  
Blinded alike from sunshine and from rain,  
As though a rose should shut, and be a bud again.'

With the rich beauties and the dim obscurities of lines like these let us contrast the Verses addressed *To a Tuft of early Violets* by the fastidious author [Gifford] of the *Baviad* and *Mæviad*:

'Sweet flowers! that from your humble beds  
Thus prematurely dare to rise,  
And trust your unprotected heads  
To cold Aquarius' watery skies.

'Retire, retire! These tepid airs  
Are not the genial brood of May;  
That sun with light malignant glares,  
And flatters only to betray.

'Stern Winter's reign is not yet past --  
Lo! while your buds prepare to blow,  
On icy pinions comes the blast,  
And nips your root, and lays you low.

'Alas, for such ungentle doom!  
But I will shield you; and supply  
A kindlier soil on which to bloom,  
A nobler bed on which to die.

'Come then-ere yet the morning ray  
Has drunk the dew that gems your crest,  
And drawn your balmiest sweets away;  
O come and grace my Anna's breast.

'Ye droop, fond flowers! But did ye know  
What worth, what goodness there reside,  
Your cups with liveliest tints would glow;  
And spread their leaves with conscious pride.

'For there has liberal Nature joined  
Her riches to the stores of Art,  
And added to the vigorous mind  
The soft, the sympathising heart.

'Come then-ere yet the morning ray  
Has drunk the dew that gems your crest,

Ultra-Crepidarius

And drawn your balmiest sweets away;  
O come and grace my Anna's breast.

'O! I should think -- that fragrant bed  
Might I but hope with you to share --  
Years of anxiety repaid  
By one short hour of transport there.

'More blest than me, thus shall ye live  
Your little day; and when ye die,  
Sweet flowers; the grateful Muse shall give  
A verse, the sorrowing maid a sigh.

'While I, alas! no distant date,  
Mix with the dust from whence I came,  
Without a friend to weep my fate,  
Without a stone to tell my name.'

We subjoin one more specimen of these 'wild strains said to be 'Written two years after the preceding.' *ECCE ITERUM CRISPINUS!*

'I wish I was where Anna lies;  
For I am sick of lingering here,  
And every hour Affection cries,  
Go, and partake her humble bier.

'I wish I could! for when she died  
I lost my all; and life has prov'd  
Since that sad hour a dreary void,  
A waste unlovely and unlov'd.

'But who, when I am turn'd to clay,  
Shall duly to her grave repair,  
And pluck the ragged moss away,  
And weeds that have "no business there"?

'And who, with pious hand, shall bring  
The flowers she cherish'd, snow-drops cold,  
And violets that unheeded spring,  
To scatter o'er her hallow'd mould?

'And who, while Memory loves to dwell  
Upon her name for ever dear,  
Shall feel his heart with passions swell,  
And pour the bitter, bitter tear?

'I DID IT; and would fate allow,  
Should visit still, should still deplore --  
But health and strength have left me now,  
But I, alas! can weep no more.

'Take then, sweet maid! this simple strain,  
The last I offer at thy shrine;  
Thy grave must then undeck'd remain,  
And all thy memory fade with mine.

'And can thy soft persuasive look,  
That voice that might with music vie,  
Thy air that every gazer took,  
Thy matchless eloquence of eye --

'Thy spirits, frolicsome as good,  
Thy courage, by no ills dismay'd,  
Thy patience by no wrongs subdued,  
Thy gay good-humour-can they "fade"?

'Perhaps -- but sorrow dims my eye:  
Cold turf, which I no more must view,  
Dear name, which I no more must sigh,  
A long, a last, a sad adieu!'

It may be said in extenuation of the low, mechanic vein of these impoverished lines, that they were written at an early age. They were the inspired production of a youthful lover! Mr. Gifford was thirty when he wrote them: Mr. Keats died when he was scarce twenty! Farther it may be said, that Mr. Gifford hazarded his first poetical attempts under all the disadvantages of a neglected education: but the same circumstance, together with a few unpruned redundancies of fancy and quaintnesses of expression, was made the plea on which Mr. Keats was hooted out of the world, and his fine talents and wounded sensibilities consigned to an early grave. In short, the treatment of this heedless candidate for poetical fame might serve as a warning, and was intended to serve as a warning, to all unfledged tyros, how they venture upon any such doubtful experiments, except under the auspices of some lord of the bedchamber or Government Aristarchus, and how they imprudently associate themselves with men of mere popular talent or independence of feeling!

It is the same in prose works. The Editor scorns to enter the lists of argument with any proscribed writer of the opposite party. He does not refute, but denounces him. He makes no concessions to an adversary, lest they should in some way be turned against him. He only feels himself safe in the fancied insignificance of others. He only feels himself superior to those whom he stigmatizes as the lowest of mankind. All persons are without common-sense and honesty who do not believe implicitly (with him) in the immaculateness of Ministers and the divine origin of Kings.

Thus he informed the world that the author [Hazlitt] of *TABLE-TALK* was a person who could not write a sentence of common English, and who could hardly spell his own name, because he was not a friend to the restoration of the Bourbons, and had the assurance to write *Characters of Shakespeare's Plays* in a style of criticism somewhat different from Mr. Gifford's. He charged this writer with imposing on the public by a flowery style; and when the latter ventured to refer to a work of his, called *An Essay on the Principles of Human Action*, which has not a single ornament in it, as a specimen of his original studies and the proper bias of his mind, the learned critic, with a shrug of great self-satisfaction, said, 'It was amusing to see this person, sitting like one of Brouwer's Dutch boors over his gin and tobacco-pipes, and fancying himself a Leibnitz!' The question was, whether the subject of Mr. Gifford's censure had ever written such a work or not; for if he had, he had amused himself with something besides gin and tobacco-pipes. But our Editor, by virtue of the situation he holds, is superior to facts or arguments: he is accountable neither to the public nor to

authors for what he says of them, but owes it to his employers to prejudice the work and vilify the writer, if the latter is not avowedly ready to range himself on the stronger side.

The *Quarterly Review*, besides the political tirades and denunciations of suspected writers, intended for the guidance of the heads of families, is filled up with accounts of books of Voyages and Travels for the amusement of the younger branches. The poetical department is almost a sinecure, consisting of mere summary decisions and a list of quotations. Mr. Croker is understood to contribute the St. Helena articles and the liberality, Mr. Canning the practical good sense, Mr. D'Israeli the good-nature, Mr. Jacob the modesty, Mr. Southey the consistency, and the Editor himself the chivalrous spirit and the attacks on Lady Morgan. It is a double crime, and excites a double portion of spleen in the Editor, when female writers are not advocates of passive obedience and non-resistance. This journal, then, is a depository for every species of political sophistry and personal calumny. There is no abuse or corruption that do not there find a jesuitical palliation or a bare-faced vindication. There we meet the slime of hypocrisy, the varnish of courts, the cant of pedantry, the cobwebs of the law, the iron hand of power. Its object is as mischievous as the means by which it is pursued are odious. The intention is to poison the sources of public opinion and of individual fame, to pervert literature from being the natural ally of freedom and humanity into an engine of priestcraft and despotism, and to undermine the spirit of the English constitution and the independence of the English character. The Editor and his friends systematically explode every principle of liberty, laugh patriotism and public spirit to scorn, resent every pretence to integrity as a piece of singularity or insolence, and strike at the root of all free inquiry or discussion by running down every writer as a vile scribbler and a bad member of society, who is not a hireling and a slave. No means are stuck at in accomplishing this liable end. Strong in patronage, they trample on truth, justice and decency. They claim the privilege of court favourites. They keep as little faith with the public as with their opponents.

No statement in the *Quarterly Review* is to be trusted: there is no fact that is not misrepresented in it, no quotation that is not garbled, no character that is not slandered, if it can answer the purposes of a party to do so. The weight of power, of wealth, of rank is thrown into the scale, gives its impulse to the machine; and the whole is under the guidance of Mr. Gifford's instinctive genius -- of the inborn hatred of servility for independence, of dulness for talent, of cunning and impudence for truth and honesty. It costs him no effort to execute his disreputable task; in being the tool of a crooked policy, he but labours in his natural vocation. He patches up a rotten system, as he would supply the chasms in a worm-eaten manuscript, from a grovelling incapacity to do anything better: thinks that if a single iota in the claims of prerogative and power were lost, the whole fabric of society would fall upon his head and crush him: and calculates that his best chance for literary reputation is by black-balling one half of the competitors as Jacobins and levellers, and securing the suffrages of the other half in his favour as a loyal subject and trusty partisan!

Mr. Gifford, as a satirist, is violent and abrupt. He takes obvious or physical defects, and dwells upon them with much labour and harshness of invective, but with very little wit or spirit. He expresses a great deal of anger and contempt; but you cannot tell very well why, except that he seems to be sore and out of humour. His satire is mere peevishness and spleen, or something worse -- personal antipathy and

rancour. We are in quite as much pain for the writer as for the object of his resentment. His address to Peter Pindar is laughable from its outrageousness. He denounces him as a wretch hateful to God and man for some of the most harmless and amusing trifles that ever were written, and the very good humour and pleasantry of which, we suspect, constituted their offence in the eyes of this Drawcansir.

His attacks on Mrs. Robinson were unmanly, and even those on Mr. Merry and the Della-Cruscan School were very much more ferocious than the occasion warranted. A little affectation and quaintness of style did not merit such severity of castigation. As a translator, Mr. Gifford's version of the Roman satirist is the baldest and, in parts, the most offensive of all others. We do not know why he attempted it, unless he had got it in his head that he should thus follow in the steps of Dryden, as he had already done in those of Pope in the *Baviad* and *Mæviad*. As an editor of old authors, Mr. Gifford is entitled to considerable praise for the pains he has taken in revising the text, and for some improvements he has introduced into it. He had better have spared the notes in which, though he has detected the blunders of previous commentators, he has exposed his own ill-temper and narrowness of feeling more. As a critic, he has thrown no light on the character and spirit of his authors. He has shown no striking power of analysis nor of original illustration, though he has chosen to exercise his pen on writers most congenial to his own turn of mind, from their dry and caustic vein -- Massinger and Ben Jonson. What he will make of Marlowe, it is difficult to guess. He has none of 'the fiery quality' of the poet.

Mr. Gifford does not take for his motto on these occasions *Spiritus precipitandus est!* His most successful efforts in this way are barely respectable. In general, his observations are petty, ill-concocted, and discover as little tact, as they do a habit of connected reasoning. Thus, for instance, in attempting to add the name of Massinger to the list of Catholic poets, our minute critic insists on the profusion of crucifixes, glories, angelic visions, garlands of roses, and clouds of incense scattered through the Virgin-Martyr, as evidence of the theological sentiments meant to be inculcated by the play, when the least reflection might have taught him that they proved nothing but the author's poetical conception of the character and costume of his subject. A writer might, with the same sinister, short-sighted shrewdness, be accused of Heathenism for talking of Flora and Ceres in a poem on the Seasons! What are produced as the exclusive badges and occult proofs of Catholic bigotry, are nothing but the adventitious ornaments and external symbols, the gross and sensible language -- in a word, the poetry of Christianity in general. What indeed shows the frivolousness of the whole inference is that Decker, who is asserted by our critic to have contributed some of the most passionate and fantastic of these devotional scenes, is not even suspected of a leaning to Popery. In like manner, he excuses Massinger for the grossness of one of his plots (that of the Unnatural Combat) by saying that it was supposed to take place before the Christian era; by this shallow common-place persuading himself, or fancying he could persuade others, that the crime in question (which yet on the very face of the story is made the ground of a tragic catastrophe) was first made statutory by the Christian religion.

The foregoing is a harsh criticism, and may be thought illiberal. But as Mr. Gifford assumes a right to say what he pleases of others, they may be allowed to speak the truth of him!

Ultra-Crepidarius

**THE END**