

*Leigh Hunt's Letters in the  
Luther Brewer Collection:  
Plans for a New Edition*

WARNER BARNES

In 1934 the library acquired its magnificent Leigh Hunt collection from the estate of Luther Brewer of Cedar Rapids, a collection containing more than 100 literary manuscripts, 1500 holograph letters, and 1700 books. Four years later a catalogue of Hunt's correspondence, *My Leigh Hunt Library: The Holograph Letters*, was issued under the imprint of The University of Iowa Press. The catalogue has been out of print for more than two decades, and since that time scholars whose interests are centered in nineteenth century English literature perennially have expressed hope that these letters might be edited anew and republished. This article, then, may serve as an announcement that Professor David Cheney of the University of Toledo and I are preparing a critical edition of all of Leigh Hunt's letters in the Brewer Collection. This will include not only the correspondence published in *The Holograph Letters* and in Mr. Brewer's other occasional works, but also more than 250 Hunt letters which the library has been fortunate to acquire in the past thirty-one years.

These letters span a period from Leigh Hunt's youth in 1810 to the year of his death in 1859. Several of the letters were written to members of his family: his wife, Marianne; his son, Thornton; his brother, John; and his nephew, Henry. A large group of letters about his books include correspondence with his publishers Henry Colburn, Edmund Ollier, Edward Moxon, and John Chapman. The majority of the letters, however, are written to the members of Hunt's circle, his benefactors, and the editors and authors of the day, and these recipients include Thomas Barnes, Vincent Novello, Serjeant Talfourd, Richard H. Horne, Tom Taylor, J. W. Dalby, William Moxon, and Percy Flor-

ence Shelley. Such an enumeration, however, does not do the collection justice; only the fully published letters themselves can reveal hitherto unknown literary relationships, provide significant biographical information, or as Luther Brewer said of Leigh Hunt's letters, 'lay bare his soul.' The following three letters, now printed for the first time, would seem to do all of this at once.

TO HENRY COLBURN<sup>1</sup>

Highgate  
July 28, 1827

Dear Sir,

You would have heard from me before this, but a calamity has come upon me in the illness of one of my children,<sup>2</sup> who is given over by Mr. Lawrence. His disease is on the lungs, and he has a hectic fever with great emaciation. I entertain hope still for my own part, because it is useful as well as desirable to entertain it, and it enables me to do all I can; but his case is very perilous, and you may imagine how it affects and occupies us. We had already a child ill,—our infant lately born,<sup>3</sup> which we are told we shall have great difficulty in rearing; but this greater distress has in a manner swallowed up the other. It is my third boy, 11 years old, a most amiable, generous-hearted little fellow. I am told that in the course of a week I shall know the worst. After that time I shall resume my pen, either with better hopes, or to lose as much of my trouble as possible in doing my work. At present I can think of little but himself, as he lies by me on the sofa. But I read, and make such memorandum as I can.

You may conceive how this circumstance has distressed me on all accounts, for while it has brought me additional expence, it has suspended my only means of defraying it. If I do not earn money with you, I earn it with nobody. The consequence is, I have been obliged to procure a note from Henry Hunt<sup>4</sup> for the half year following the

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<sup>1</sup> Henry Colburn (*d.* 1855); London publisher whose advance of £200 enabled Leigh Hunt and his family to return to England after three years spent in Italy, 1822-1825. For this he agreed to submit some of his own writing with an autobiography. However, once back in England and finding himself unable to complete such a work, he changed the emphasis of his subject matter and wrote 'that book about Byron.' This was published by Colburn in 1828 with the title: *Lord Byron and Some of his Contemporaries with Recollections of the Author's Life and Visit to Italy.*

<sup>2</sup> Swinburne Hunt (1816-1827) died within two months after this letter was written.

<sup>3</sup> Arabella Hunt, the youngest of Leigh and Marianne's eleven children and one of their three who died in childhood.

<sup>4</sup> Henry Hunt, nephew of Leigh, who at this time was acting as a mediator

one lately advanced; and I enclose it to you, in the hope, that in discounting it with the usual interest, as you did the last, you might at once do a great benefit to me, and no serious inconvenience to yourself. Pray oblige me if you can, and be assured that I am even now as much occupied with your concerns as it is possible for me to be under the circumstances. The prospect of writing my novel<sup>5</sup> is so agreeable to me, that I turn my thoughts as often as I can to the plot and characters of it, in order to refresh my mind as well as to lose no time. I have decided upon its being *written by the hero himself*, a man of a noble family in those days; which I think will make it more lively and real-looking.

*Perhaps if you cannot attend to this matter today, you will oblige me by a call tomorrow or Monday morning, and doing it for me then; when I will shew you *Ld. Byron's letters*, and talk about the *Title-page and &c.*—*

Very truly your's,  
Leigh Hunt.

TO ANNA MOWATT<sup>6</sup>

Kensington  
March 9 1850

My dear Mrs. Mowatt,

This letter does not come to plague you, but to hope that you will not suffer yourself to be plagued with anything till you get well again, not even with authors. My son Vincent<sup>7</sup> who brings it, and who brought my play<sup>8</sup> to your house when you first heard of it from our friend Major Campbell,<sup>9</sup> hopes to find you already better, but begs

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between his uncle and his father, John, who was estranged from Leigh because of a disagreement about the latter's ownership and interest in *The Examiner* while he was in Italy. It was Henry who arranged the legal and financial dissolution between the brothers four months later.

<sup>5</sup> The novel, published by Colburn in [1830] 1832, was *Sir Ralph Esher*.

<sup>6</sup> Anna Cora Mowatt (1819-1870); American actress and author, perhaps best known in this country for her efforts in establishing Mount Vernon as a national shrine. In 1849-1850 she was the toast of the London stage for her performances in *Fashion*, a satire of social life in New York.

<sup>7</sup> Vincent Hunt (1823-1852); Leigh's favorite son was his father's secretary throughout his life.

<sup>8</sup> The play was *Lovers Amazements*, published in *Leigh Hunt's Journal*, 1850-1851. Originally Mrs. Mowatt was to have the lead, but the production was cancelled because of her continuing illness here referred to. It was subsequently produced some years later at the Lyceum Theatre, London, opening on January 20, 1858. Two versions of the play were written, and manuscripts of both are in the Brewer collection.

<sup>9</sup> Robert Calder Campbell (1798-1857); retired military officer and minor writer of verse and prose.

to be considered as not desiring to trespass upon your sickness personally. He will be content with hearing of you at your door, till he can have the pleasure of seeing you well. To shew how little trouble I would fain give you at any time, I heard from my son-in-law the other day (who was so fortunate as to speak with you) that you found the play a great deal too long; and all I can say is, pray cut it a great deal shorter;—that is to say, if I have the good fortune to be finally approved in consequence of your kind zeal in its behalf. A drama in my opinion should be as much as possible like a drawn sword,—as brilliant as you please, but sharp and swift in action. If you can help me to make it so by any retrenchment of the blade, that is all the trouble that would fain be required of you

by your obliged humble servant,

Yours,

Leigh Hunt

P.S. They cut down the Legend of Florence a good deal at Covent Garden, and I disputed not a syllable. Nor did I suffer the printed copy to vary from the acted one: though I would fain not have *altered* the fifth act from its first intention. For I do not like altering, though I highly approve compression. But don't trouble yourself with a bit of all this *now*, if you continue unwell.

#### TO ALFRED NOVELLO<sup>10</sup>

Hammersmith

Dec. 28 1853

My Dear Alfred,

I have been thinking,—Suppose I should die, before these articles, which are to purchase the Harmonium, are finished?—I have no reason to suppose it likely; but at my age, and in my state of health, such an event ought to come within one's calculations; and therefore I have to say, as follows:—

If I live to complete the articles, I complete of course the purchase. If I do not so live, I propose that the Harmonium shall be understood to have been hired, and that the hire shall have been liquidated out of the cost of the articles furnished,—the instrument of course to be

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<sup>10</sup> (Joseph) Alfred Novello (1810-1896); musician, singer, and proprietor of Novello and Company, was the son of Leigh Hunt's intimate friend, Vincent Novello. Alfred, the originator in England of publishing standard editions of choral music in inexpensive formats, was the founder of the *Musical Times and Singing Class Circular* for which Hunt wrote the articles in question. Apparently he had no difficulty in completing them, for in 1854 Novello's journal published the following by Hunt: "Twelfth Night," "An Effusion upon Cream," "Eating Songs," "On the Combination of Grave and Gay," and "An Organ in the House."

returned accordingly. I do not, you will observe, contemplate an arrangement of this kind, under any other contingency but that of life and death, or of such a final state of health as prevents me from writing at all. The purchase is absolute, as before agreed on, and only modified by the above possibility. I have already told you, that one of my great objects in again having a musical instrument is to increase as well as enliven my stock of subjects for writing, and enable me to settle the only few and small remaining debts which I have; and therefore you will understand the feelings under which I propose to make this arrangement. I am taking steps for their liquidation in another manner, should death surprise me, being resolved not to go out of the world in a state of injustice to anybody; but I hope, and believe I have good reason to hope, that I shall live to see these little matters quite settled, and to be able to take the right final look at my setting sun.

Every truly yours,  
Leigh Hunt

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[NOTE: Spelling and punctuation remain unchanged, except Hunt's use of the ampersand has been replaced by "and".]